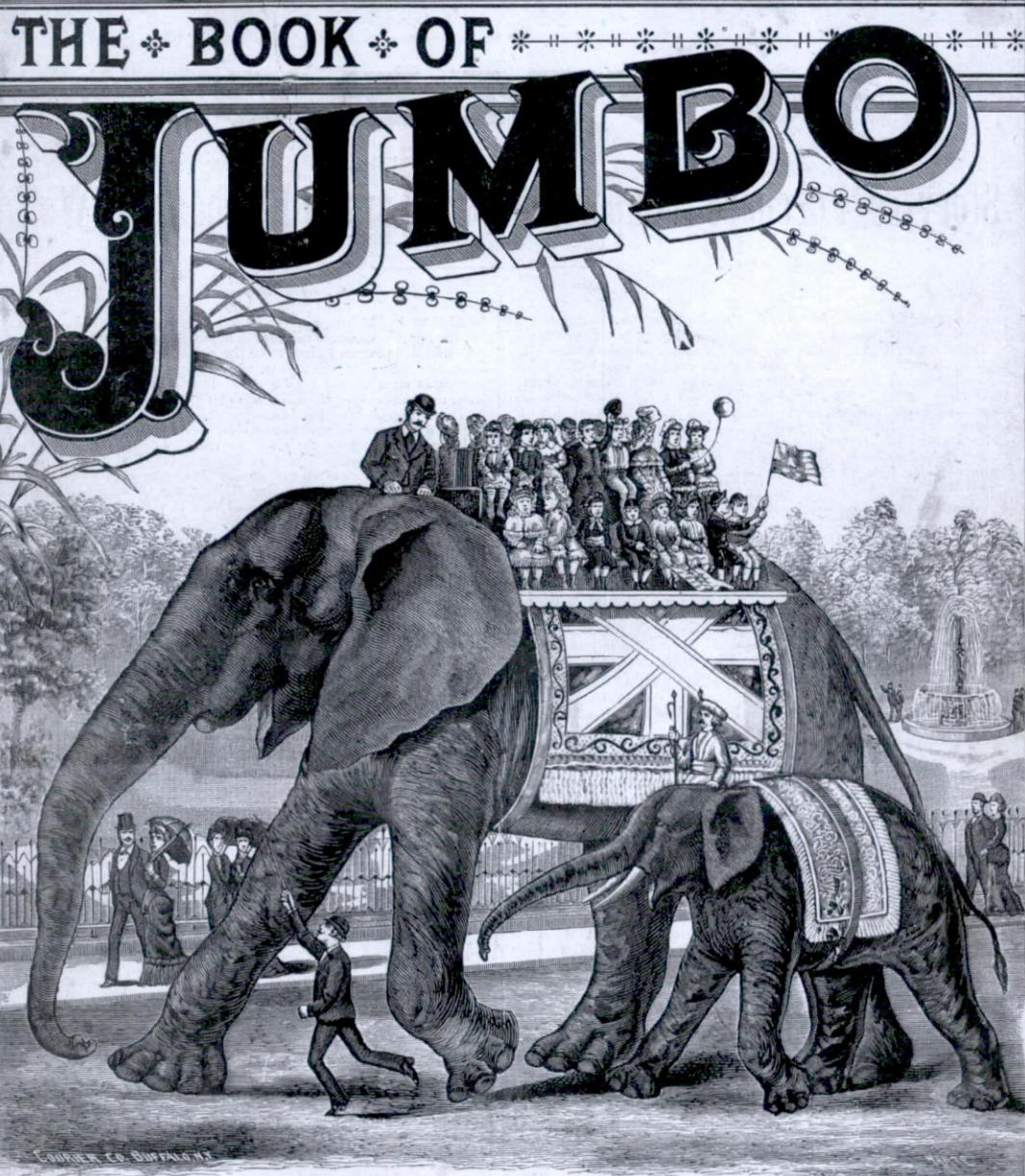


BANDWAGON

January-February 2012 • Volume 56 Number 1



COURTESY OF THE BUFFALO & ERIE RAILROAD MUSEUM
HISTORY OF THE LARGEST ELEPHANT THAT EVER LIVED.

DAYTON, SATURDAY, MAY 19th.

BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc.

January-February 2012 • Volume 56, Number 1

Fred D. Pfening III  **Editor and Publisher**

Bandwagon: The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968) is published bimonthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc. for CHS members.

Bandwagon office of publication: 1075 West Fifth Avenue, Columbus, OH 43212 with additional entry at Jefferson City, MO. Periodical postage paid at Columbus, OH and additional entry offices. Postmaster: send all address changes to Bandwagon, 1075 West Fifth Avenue, Columbus, OH 43212.

Advertising rates: back cover, \$350.00; full page, \$200.00; half page, \$125.00; quarter page \$75.00.

Back Issues: A *Bandwagon* article index is on the CHS website <www.circushistory.org>. Issues from 1957 to 1969 are \$9.00 each; from 1970 to 2011 are \$7.00 each. Within the United States postage is \$2.50 for one issue, \$5.00 for two or more. Current year issues: \$11.00 each plus \$2.50 postage. Issues may be ordered from the office of publication above.

Circus Historical Society Mission Statement: "To preserve, promote and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

Membership rate: Circus Historical Society membership is \$60.00 per year in the United States, \$80.00 per year in Canada, and \$105.00 international. Membership application and information are available on the CHS website <www.circushistory.org>, by contacting the Bandwagon office, or from the Secretary-Treasurer.

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CHS Strategic Planning

On June 12 and 13 the CHS Board of Trustees and Fred Dahlinger took part in a Strategic Planning exercise facilitated by Jenny Erickson of the Sauk County University of Wisconsin—Extension. The primary goal was to discover and deal with the challenges facing our organization.

Work began in February when trustees were polled to consider the association's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, goals, and mission as well as pinpointing the people and groups who have a stake in the success of the society. The information gathered became the raw material for the participants to begin their work in identifying the issues that most needed to be tackled to assure the future health of the CHS.

After hours of lively discussion, seven strategic challenges were identified, three of which were determined to be of higher priority than others. They were to produce *Bandwagon* more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably; to develop the board's capacity to best lead the CHS; and to recruit and retain an active, engaged membership.

A series of action steps was devised to address these topics, the most important of which was the decision that the trustees would meet via teleconference on a monthly basis until no longer necessary. The first meeting took place on August 16. It covered the *Bandwagon* schedule, board organization and committee structure, and the development of a membership recruitment plan.

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Thanks

As a result of delays caused by circumstances beyond anyone's control, this January-February *Bandwagon* is being completed in late August. A workable plan is now in place to address this situation, and my goal is to mail an issue every five or six weeks until we get caught up. During this hiatus, readers have been admirably patient, and their continued tolerance will be rewarded.

Many CHS members have gone beyond the call of duty to assist in the production of this issue. My thanks to Maureen Brundale, Neil Cockerline, Fred Dahlinger, Dick Flint, Mort Gamble, John Gilmore, Kelly McCoy, Janet Pfening, John Polacsek, Jennifer Lemmer Posey, Dave Price, Richard Reynolds, Mark Schmitt, and especially Debbie Walk. I want to also thank John and Mardi Wells for their imaginative graphics and layout. The different, and one hopes more appealing, look of this issue is almost entirely the result of their ideas. Fred D. Pfening III

Another outcome of the planning session was the formulation of the CHS's first mission statement. It reads: "To preserve, promote and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

Erickson prepared a detailed report of what was accomplished at the meeting, a summary of which is available to interested members by emailing President Judy Griffin at <circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com>. Bob Cline



The Covers

It's remarkable for a single attraction to overwhelm every other feature on a circus, especially when that circus had the name Barnum in its title. Jumbo was so well known in 1883, only his second season in America, that the circus to which he belonged wasn't mentioned on the cover of the courier, an unheard of practice. It measures 10½" x 14" and contains sixteen pages, all devoted to the elephantine wonder of the age. It began with the story of Jumbo's purchase from the London Zoo, noted the craze his exodus from England caused, quoted angry and remorseful editorials from the British press, and recounted his journey to America. All twenty-two illustrations inside the booklet feature the great pachyderm.

Only on the last two pages are the other highlights of the extravaganza mentioned. The back cover, our back cover, mentions Barnum's name only once, and completely omits those of his partners James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson.

When the Barnum and London Circus played Dayton, Ohio on May 19, 1883, its population was 38,677, a fair sized town for its day. The route book contains only the cursory comments that it rained during the night show, and that a hippodrome rider had taken ill. After playing Dayton on a Saturday, the show made a Sunday run, a short haul to Cincinnati where big business was expected for the three day stand beginning on Monday. It wasn't to be. The rain that vexed the show in Dayton, continued all day Sunday, then on Monday snow added to the misery, causing the cancelation of the performances. After more rain on Tuesday the circus management decided to abandon the date with the promise that the circus would return later in the year. Indeed, the Queen City saw the Greatest Show on Earth from August 27-30.

Jumbo's impact on the bottom line of the Barnum and London Circus was, well, Gargantuan. In 1882 and 1883 the show's profits were the largest of any years between 1881 and 1897. In 1883, the show cleared around \$560,000, which would be approximately \$13,000,000 today. Income and profits nosedived in 1884 and 1885, the year Jumbo was killed late in the season, and never reached the heights of his first two tours. The original courier is in the Pfening Archives. Fred Pfening III

Tuffy Genders' Journal of the 1936 Season



Harold "Tuffy" Genders posed for this studio shot by Strand of New York around 1936. Pfening Archives.

Note

This is not a diary, if I had wanted that I would have bought a diary and tryed (sic) to keep it up.

In the following pages, you will find some of the things that happened, some of the things I did, and some of the things I thought about during the season of 1936 on the Ringling Bros. Circus. If you still want to read it; go right ahead.

Harold Genders.

1936 written in Brooklyn

April

8 - Opened in Madison Square Garden for 25 days. Working with 7 people act known as "The Flying Comets." Business was very good the entire engagement. We stayed at the Capitol Hotel just opposite the Garden. Everyone had bad colds the first week, I had one of my coughs, and then Grayce got one, the weather was rainy and cool nearly the whole engagement, seemed like Spring was never coming.

Richard Shannon was around with his Real Silk hosiery and of course Grayce had to have some, also Ansonia's (shoes). We moved from the Garden the night of May 2 for Boston.

May

3 - Sunday in Boston We didn't get in until about three o'clock and we had to get the rigging up. Grayce went to a show with Gladys White, we finished the rigging about 10:30 and went to the cars to bed. Sleeping in Car 91 we have section no. 14 but won't start fixing it up until next week in Brooklyn. I hope.

4 - Opened in Boston Mon. afternoon everything O.K. Business

Harold "Tuffy" Genders was born April 20, 1911, and raised on a farm outside Bloomington, Illinois. His was an adolescence filled with athleticism. He got his nickname during his time in the High School Golden Gloves Boxing program. Like his good friend Arthur Concello, he learned to fly at the Bloomington Y.M.C.A. under the direction of C. D. Curtis. He wed Grace E. Moore in 1932 atop the pedestal board of the Five Fearless Fishers flying trapeze act. Both were members of the troupe at the time. When his days in the air ended, he transitioned into management, eventually becoming General Manager of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

His journal is an evocative record of the rhythms and cadences of circus life during the Depression. He documents what was important to him—the weather, lot quality, audience size, visitors, payday, what he did in his off hours, and of course, noteworthy occurrences. Some events, such as a little girl dying after being hit by a falling quarter pole in Washington, never made it into the route book, and may have been lost forever had Genders not written about them. This journal, along with sixteen others, was recently donated to the Circus & Allied Arts Collection of Milner Library, Illinois State University by Deana Genders Buckley, granddaughter of Tuffy Genders. Thanks to Maureen Brunsdale and Mark Schmitt for providing a typescript of the journal and illustrations.

All illustrations are used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library, unless otherwise noted.

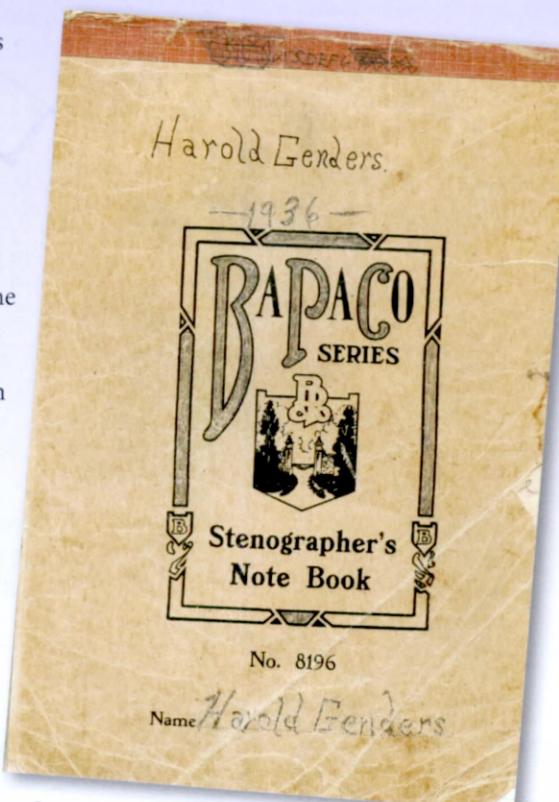
light in the afternoon but wonderful everyday after that. Walter Guice had a spring break on the side of his net, throwing him out on the stage. He hurt his knee pretty bad and cut his eye.

We went to a theatre Thursday nite to see some circus pictures taken by Mr. [George Brinton] Beal. They were very good.

9 - Closing day in Boston. Business has been wonderful the whole week, talk of holding the show 9 days next year. We shall see.

10 - Arrived in Brooklyn about 2:30 P.M. "Lazz" was at the train with Art's Pack and we ate breakfast at 4:00 P.M. and then went to the lot and stayed until about 6:30 then ate again and went to a show and then to bed. The show surely looked good with all the canvas white and new.

11 - Well this is the big day, the opening under canvas, it's a fine day a little cool but the sun is



Cover of modest note book Genders used for his journal. It measures 6" x 8 3/4".

shining bright. Between shows we start collecting things to fix up the berth, it's going to be quite a task.

12 - Weather still nice even better than yesterday because it's warmer in fact I would call this a perfect circus day.

13 - Well here it is the first day of rain, it started just before "spec" and kept up off and on all thru the matinee. Still raining for the nite show, very poor house. Stopped raining long enough for us to get home.

14 - Thurs. Nice and clear but pretty cool wind blowing nice in the top though. Business only fair.

15 - Nice day but cool. Night show our first full house of the season. I bought an inner-spring mattress for the berth, sure was better. We are getting the berth pretty well fixed now. It's going to be pretty nice. I think. We went to China town last nite with "Gee" Uyeno he's leaving the act next week.

16 - Sat. closing day in Brooklyn. Nice day but too cold to suit me. Business big to-day. Art [Concello] bought a movie camera and projector so we were shooting pictures between shows. We had to get out of the cars at 9:00 A.M. this morning as they ferry the coaches over to Jersey City.

I'll be glad when it gets 100 degrees in the shade, this is not my kind of weather. If I seem to get off the tense now and then in this yarn don't mind that as I often get a few days behind and have to catch up.

17 - Sun. in Washington got uptown about 4:00 P.M. had "breakfast" at Ambassador Hotel and met friend of Beebe Siegrist, stayed in the room until 9:00 P.M. and had dinner there and then to a very "lousy" picture. If the guy that wrote that got it filmed it should be a cinch for me to sell this thing. Home to bed at 1:00 A.M.

18 - I sprang out of bed this morning at 11:30 A.M. and walked to the lot talking to myself about how nice and warm it was.

The matinee starts with nearly a full house, the show has been on about an hour when it starts to rain nice and gentle like, which is alright. All of a sudden someone says we're going to have some wind, and he knew what he was talking about it seems for in about five minutes the side poles were flying around like so many tooth picks, and the people were coming out of the Big Top thru the rips in the canvas, down the guy lines, and from under the side wall, looking like drown rats. It seemed as if everyone had a 2 year old child in their arms. And from the way they were howling I don't believe the younger generation of Washington think the circus is all it's "cracked up" to be. By this time they have stopped the show and the band have moved to the center ring, and true to tradition are playing for all they're worth although I imagine they would

much rather be outside under a wagon, because the quarter poles are swinging back and forth many of them with two or three boys hanging on them, really doing about as much good as that many flies.

About this time comes a terrific crash and everyone on this lot thinks they're struck by lightning, but find out it hit a center pole on the ring stock top and "knocked out" six grooms. This lasted for about half an hour and then settled down to just a steady rain so the show went on with the high wire, cannon, and they gave the few remaining customers the Wild West free.

We didn't have to work, I didn't mind that either. The doors are open for the nite show and it's still raining.

I just now heard that a little girl who was struck by a pole died in the hospital. I don't know how many more were seriously hurt. I imagine the scene to-day was much the same as it would be on a sinking ship.

19 - Woke up this morning in the rain again, but at 1 P.M. cleared off into a beautiful day and evening. Matinee nearly full, I imagine the newspaper head lines last nite (One killed and scores injured at Circus) hurt the business considerably.

20 - Baltimore, Perfect circus day. Business big. The lot is about 7 miles from the cars. Just across the street from Pimlico race track. The "Preakness" was last Sat. I wish we could have been there then.

Received orders to wear coats in the cook-house until further notice, some of the boys were rushing the season a little.

21 - Nice day but very cool at night.

The Three Fonzals visiting a while, they open in Washington to-morrow. Had slight argument with cab driver on the way home. Pay Day by the way.

22 - Wilmington, Del. Another nice day but cool at night. Cars only about three blocks from a very dusty lot. A front doorman badly

hurt on the train last night.

23 - Atlantic City. The Playground of the Nation as they say. Well I strolled down the famous boardwalk this morning and saw the sunbathers on the beach wishing all the while I had brought my top-coat. How they take it I don't know, although I didn't see any of them very near the water. Now that the sun has gone down it's plenty cold. Well to-morrow is the day of rest and then a week stand. Not such a tough life after all.

24 - Sunday in Philadelphia very quiet, went to two shows and home to bed. The warmest day we've had this summer.

25 - Nice day but the lot is very dusty. The matinee was nearly sold out to Ellis Gimbel for the orphan kiddies of Philadelphia



Grace Genders and Antoinette Concello about 1936. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

this was the 21st annual party. The Governor of Pennsylvania and the Mayor of Philadelphia were both here and gave short talks.

26 - Wonderful day, just my kind of weather. Two fair houses. Orders to stop all radios and musical instruments at 1 A.M.

27 - Rained from 9:00 A.M. until 10:00 A.M. then the sun came out to give us another fine day. Full house at nite.

28 - Maybe I don't love my art enough but this is the day that interests me most, Pay Day. Plenty cool all day in fact I might say cold.

29 - Nice day. Business good. Went to a party after the show and had a very good time.

30 - Cool again, it feels like fall to-nite. We've got the act cut down now to two tricks apiece and the passing leap. Pretty soft, eh what?

31 - Sun. Newark. Quiet day went to two pictures and home to bed early.

June

1 - Grayce's brother visited, he's attending W.U. School here. Business very good.

2 - Nice day, lots of visitors from N.Y. Business good.

3 - Trenton, N.J. Very warm day. About 6:30 we had pretty bad wind as it was very dusty lot, it made it look worse than it really was. Good business at nite in spite of this.

4 - Easton, Pa. Nice lot and day. The Golden Eagle also flew. Practiced between shows. Cars 2½ miles.

5 - Scranton, Pa. Warm day but dusty lot. Walkmir dropped his high perch this afternoon, both girls are hurt bad, but won't know for sure until X-rays are developed, the exact extent of their injuries.

6 - Patterson, N.J. Good grassy lot and plenty of sun. Matinee 45 min. late first time this season. Walkmir's not seriously injured. Cars about 4 miles.

7 - Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Picnic to-day. About 40 people out of the dressing rooms, took the bus and went to a nice lake for a dandy picnic. Johnny Grady was the promoter and he handled it nobly. To me it was the best Sunday so far this season.

8 - It's been threatening rain all day but it hasn't caught us yet. Nice grassy lot, business only fair.

9 - Waterbury, Conn. Cars three blocks from lot, nice day. This thing is turning into diary but can I help it if nothing happens.

10 - New Haven, Conn. Dusty lot about 4 miles from the cars. We played baseball to-day for the first time this season.

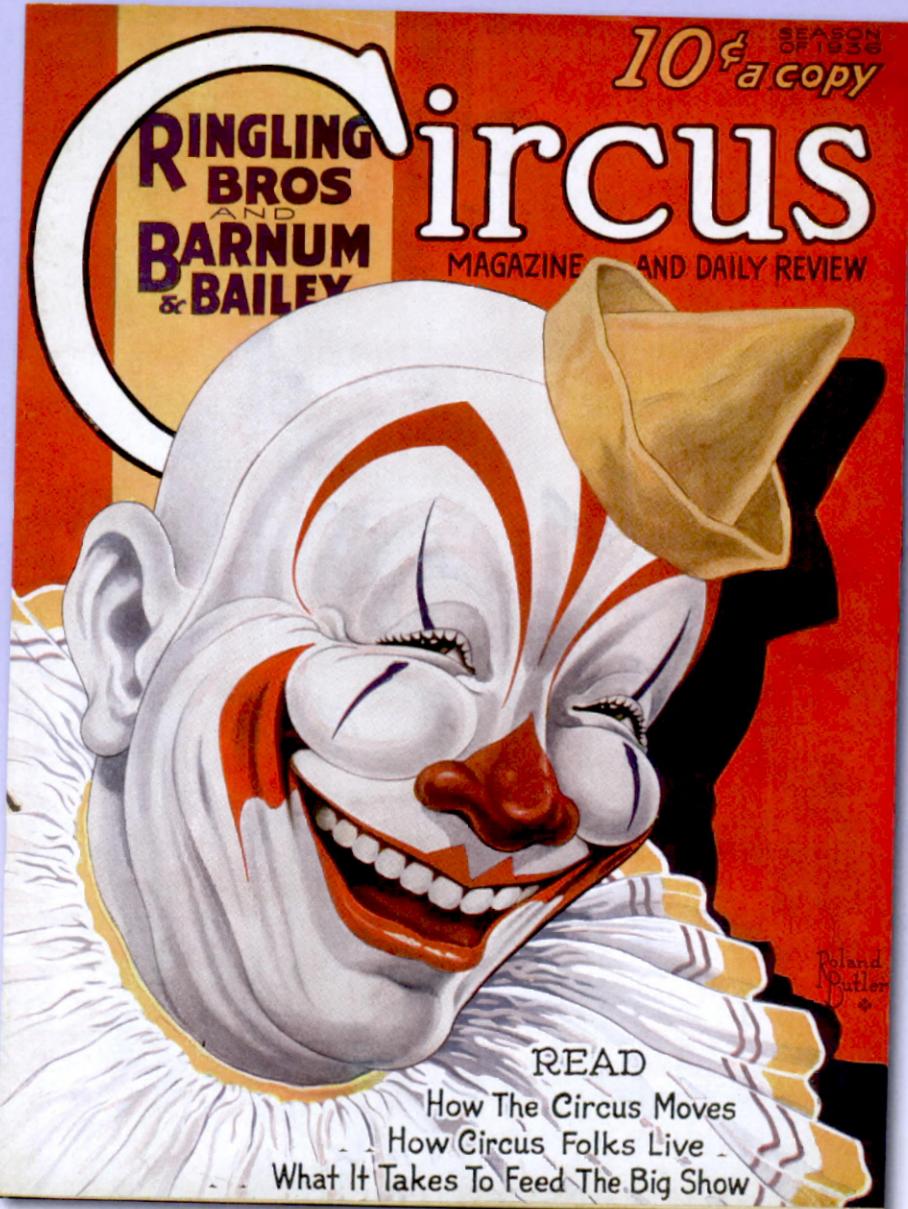
11 - New London, Conn. Fine lot two miles from cars. Pay Day and very welcome too. Bertram Mills' son from Mills Olympia Circus London has been visiting several days.

12 - Stamford, Conn. Good lot, cars near town. After all this time we're only 25 miles from New York to-day.

13 - Bridgeport, Conn. Rain all day, it's the worst day we've had so far this season. Cars about 4 miles from the lot. Business good and a wonderful audience.

14 - Rained all day, things are getting rather damp after three days of this. Cars only about two blocks from lot.

15 - New Bedford, Mass. Well a fine day and can we take it. The



In the 1936 program the Flying Comets were in Ring #1 with the Flying Concellos in the Center Ring, and the Otaris in Ring #3. Roland Butler's clown on program cover shows the artist at the height of his powers. Pfening Archives.

lot was so full of clothes lines you could hardly get around. Mme. Gillette has disappeared and they have the police looking for her.

17 - Fall River, Mass. - Nice day, "gravity" lot. They had Gillette locked up in the P.O. last nite, I don't know where he is to-day, they haven't found her yet. Jimmy Mooney had Grayce, Bob, and I out to his house for dinner between shows, it was sure a nice dinner. The soccer team won again the town team to-day. Reiner arrived to-nite.

18 - Worcester, Mass. More rain but it's a nice grassy lot so it's not bad. They're taking steps to deport Mr. Gillette, it seems that he "slugged" his wife hence her disappearance. Business very good here.

19 - Hartford, Conn. Well no rain so far to-day although we've been expected (sic) it any minute. "Hartford Shorty" was here of course. The cook-house was about ½ mile but I made it twice to-day never the less.

20 - Springfield, Mass. Nice day and lot. Business big. Cars close to town. Letter from [C.D.] Curtis and Holl [Chuck Holloway, both

of the Bloomington Y.M.C.A.] insulting us for not writing.

21 - Albany, N.Y. Sunday and another picnic at Crystal Lake about 15 miles out. Had a good time and got home in time to see the Louis-Schmeling fight pictures. Mme Gillette has returned.

22 - Nice day. Reiner is here again, came from N.Y. this time. Tom Hart an old timer died with his makeup on this afternoon, just as he came from making a number.

23 - Schenectady, N.Y. The Great Thorpe visited with his troupe this afternoon. The cook-house is about 6 blocks but I made it.

24 - Utica, N.Y. Cloudy day, but no rain as yet. Dandy lot about 2½ miles from cars. Town close to cars.

25 - Binghamton, N.Y. Lot about 6 blocks. This is the town we skipped last year on account of the floods. Pay day again. The Walkmirs came back to-day they're getting along fine.

26 - Syracuse, N.Y. Cloudy day, good lot. Cars near town for a change.

27 - Rochester, N.Y.

28 - Sunday Buffalo, N.Y. Quiet day very cool, we went to two shows and home to bed. They water-proofed the big top to-day.

29 - Windy cold day and dusty lot. Antoinette's [Concello] mother's home town, we went there for a visit and dandy night lunch. Straw house.

30 - Erie, Pa. Cool day and raining hard until about 2 P.M. Walter Guice went out of the net, but didn't get hurt.

July

1 - Ashtabula, Ohio. Nice day but rather cool. Cars close to the lot

for a change, but the cookhouse nearly ½ mile. McIntyre died.

2 - Youngstown, Ohio. I sprang out at 8 A.M. and walked about three miles to the lot. Just as the nite show started, a downpour began; the customers coming out after the big show looked like drown rats. We were lucky and got to the cars without even getting damp. Pay Day again.

3 - Oil City, Pa. Show started 1 hour late. Soft lot, plenty of "gravity." Long jump again to-nite.

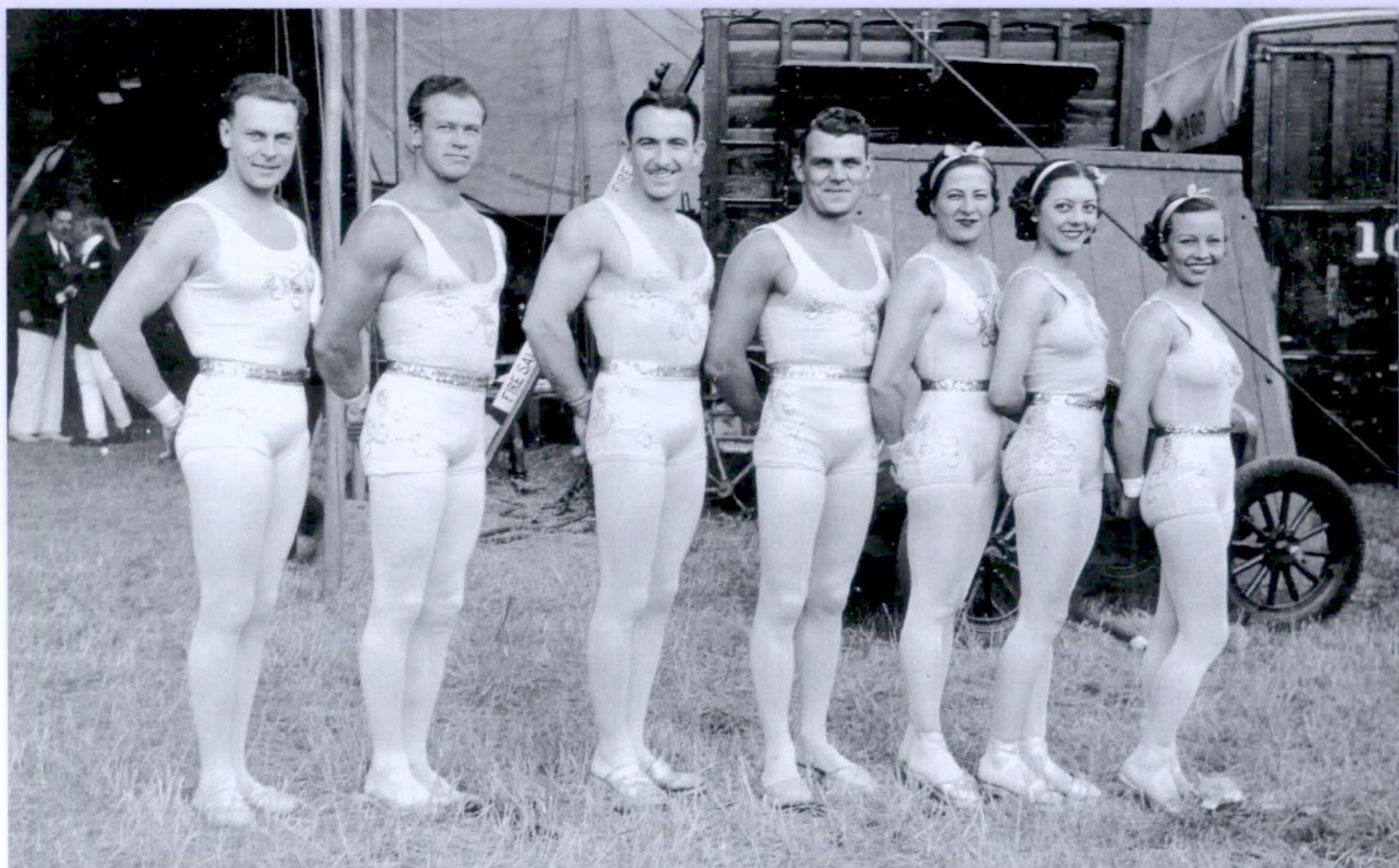
4 - Bradford, Pa. Show started one hour late again. They had to bring the wagons down the main street and as they were having the usual parades at the same time, there was plenty of difficulty, a wagon ran over a lady standing on a corner and crushed one leg off. The matinee was a full house. We couldn't have the planned party in the big top due to the late matinee.

5 - Sunday, Pittsburg, Pa. Got in town about 3 P.M. and went out to West View Park and rode the "coaster" about a dozen times and came back uptown in time to see a show. Rode to the cars with Cliff McDougall, Press agent for Tom Mix.

6 - Very warm day and dirty lot. The Whites have their two kiddies with them to-day. Cole Bros. were on this same lot about 6 weeks ago.

7 - Pittsburg. This is the warmest day we've had this season I believe. I got up early this morning and practiced a little. About 30 working men had a touch of ptomaine poisoning this evening they were plenty sick. The Doctor was sure doing a rushing business.

8 - Columbus, Ohio. Well at last the hot weather has caught up with us. This is the hottest one so far. Dandy lot, cars about 3 miles.



The Flying Comets at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, August 5, 1936. Left to right, Everett White, Bob Porter, Wayne Larey, Harold Genders, Marian Bordner, LaVon Bornhauser and Grayce Genders. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

Swimming pool near cars.

9 - Dayton, Ohio. Hotter than yesterday. 142 degrees in the "Top." Cars close to the lot. This is the lot we had the flood on last year. Thunder shower in the evening. Very light matinee. Strong wind came up just as we were supposed to work, so they called off the aerial acts, believe it or not.

10 - Cincinnati, Ohio. Another hot one, very light matinee. Received word to-day that Dad hurt his good eye but guess it's going to be alright.

11 - Lexington, Ky. Started out hot but had a nice rain while the matinee was on, so its nice this evening. Business good after 3 days not so good due to the hot weather. Very good lot about 3 miles from the cars.

12 - Louisville, Ky. It's still hot and how! Quiet day went to pictures, up to the Rooney's room for little while and home to bed.

13 - Hot again. Matinee very light. Got up early and went to town with Willy K. Good lot. Cars at 14th and Main streets.

14 - Indianapolis, Ind. Hotter than ever. We had a little shower between shows, but it didn't cool it off any. We are going swimming to-nite there is a pool near the cars. Had letter from home Dad's eye is O.K. now. Think I'll change my mind about saying "This is my kind of weather."

15 - Lima, Ohio. Oh! Relief at last the temperature dropped nearly 20 degrees. It sure feels good. Good lot about 3 miles from the cars.

16 - Akron, Ohio. Another nice day, very cool this evening. Also Pay Day, Cars are near the very dusty lot.

17 - Mansfield, Ohio. Perfect day, friends from Bloomington visited. Cars about 4½ miles from lot, but near town.

18 - Toledo, Ohio. Threatening rain all day, lot 4 miles from town.

To-morrow we work; not so good! Business very good.

19 - Sun., Detroit. This is the first Sunday we've worked since N.Y. It's plenty cool to-nite in fact cold. Cars right on lot. Big matinee and lots of visitors.

20 - Detroit. Changed lots, we'll be on this one two days. Business not so good to-day. We went to Ralph Hunter's after the show, nice little party. Ralph once worked in Bloomington as an artist for Eureka.

21 - Nice cool day. Matinee light, and that's about all. Allen King was around this afternoon.

22 - Flint, Mich. Rained until about noon. Lot only about a block from the cars.

23 - Battle Creek, Mich. Very hard rain lasting nearly all between shows. Short act this afternoon three tricks. Art's rigging buckled last nite and how!

24 - South Bend, Ind. Big Day. Sprang out of bed at 7:30 A.M. to meet Grayce's Mother and Sister, they left between shows and the Beagles, friends of ours with an animal act, arrived about the same time, well they all saw the show so every body's happy I hope. Tomorrow is the Big City and we start our mid-season "vacation" for 9 days.

25 - Chicago. We checked in the Crillon at about 11:00 A.M. The first day is on.

26 - Sunday. Plenty warm working to-day. Business just fair. Dressing rooms better than last year.

27 - Walkmir went to work this afternoon with his new airplane act, it looks pretty good. Plenty of visitors around.

28 - Nice cool day. Grayce's Aunt and Uncle were here for the nite show. Business fair.

For years the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus set up inside Chicago's Soldier Field. Sverre Braathen walked to the top of the stadium's seats when he took this picture on August 3, 1936.



29 - Still lots of visitors. Plenty cool to-nite. They took a group picture of the Flying Act number this afternoon. Nite show straw house.

30 - Well I sprang out at 9:00 A.M. and went thru the plant of Swift and Co. it was very interesting, they finished up with a nice lunch for everyone. Agnes Doss is visiting. Pay Day! Hurrah!

31 - We had a group picture taken this morning of the whole show. They were very good. Somewhat warmer to-day.

August - Chicago

1 - Nothing much happening, we went to the Black Hawk Café after the show.

2 - Well this is the last of Chi. I think everyone is rather glad it's over.

3 - Janesville, Wisc. The Great "Holl" is here, he's on his vacation and he's going to follow us to-nite. I think I'm going to ride over with him to-nite.

4 - Madison, Wisc. "Holl" and Crystal [Chuck and Crystal Holloway] are here again to-day. They took us for a ride between shows. They go back to Chicago to-morrow. Business big, very cool this evening. Everything is surely dried up around here.

5 - Fond du Lac, Wis. The Erlitz's are here friends of ours from Oshkosh. We went home with them and stayed all nite.

6 - Appleton, Wis. Our friends brought us here, they are great circus fans. Maybe their daughter Mary will be on the show. Driver killed on the lot last nite.

7 - Manitowac, Wis. Friends today from Sheboygan, also Wm. Lindeman caught the matinee. Nice cool day.

8 - Milwaukee, Wis. Oshkosh friends again to-day, they brought their trailer this time and parked behind the dressing room.

9 - Milwaukee. Miss Bach's sister and her husband took us to dinner between shows. The Erlitz's are staying in their trailer, it

surely is a dandy. Bad storm between shows.

10 - Rockford, Ill. Nice day and lot about 2 miles from town, cars in town at station. No company to-day, we must be slipping.

11 - Davenport, Iowa. Curtis is here to-day, he flew up with Bob Davis. Cars in town lot 2 miles. Straw house at nite. A man was run over and killed by a wagon on the way to the train. I don't think he was with the show.

12 - Cedar Rapids. Our wedding anniversary, 4 years. Grayce has been sick all day. Big business both afternoon and nite.

13 - Des Moines, Iowa. Fine day, fair grounds lot. I saw a real fire uptown this morning, a big ice plant burned to the ground. I got there even before the fire engines.

14 - Waterloo, Iowa. The Beagles visited, we had a wiener roast after the show. Very good business. I lost \$5.00 out of my pocket, isn't that nice?

15 - Mason City, Iowa. The Matinee was the biggest house this season on the straw all the way around. Bad wind came up just as we were going to work, we did one trick. Night house fair. Rain.

16 - LaCrosse, Wis. Straw house again in the afternoon. Sandy lot, very dirty. This makes our fifth straight Sunday working.

17 - Dubuque, Iowa. Another big matinee, lot about 4 miles from town and cars. Quick act in the afternoon. Rain between shows.

18 - Galesburg, Ill. Matinee started at 3:30 very hot day. Art's mother and sister were here he went home with them. Cars in a cornfield. Louis knocked Sharkey out in the 3rd round.

19 - Peoria, Ill. Very dirty lot. Mom and Dad came about noon and we went home with them. Big rain at nite.

20 - Decatur, Ill. Stayed all nite in Bloomington. Grayce had a new tooth put in. Had a chicken dinner and left for Decatur at noon. Chuck Holloway thinks he is going to get a job in Portland, Oregon. Plenty of visitors in the evening from Bloomington, so I go in and flop all over the net. Red and Mitzi [Sleeter] were with us all



Ringling-Barnum midway and side show banner line, La Crosse, Wisconsin, August 16, 1936. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

day. Chuck and Crystal came down to tell us good-bye in case they leave, and I left the lot without seeing them, wasn't that nice?

21 - St. Louis, Mo. Hot and very dusty lot. Seems rather quiet after two days of visitors. I'm afraid it's going to be hot to sleep to-nite.

22 - Still St. Louis, very quiet day, light matinee and plenty hot.

23 - Our last day here and everybody is glad, this is about the worst lot we've had. Plenty long jump 239 miles. Sunday.

24 - Springfield, Mo. Late! Matinee started at 5:00 P.M. No concert. We did a short act.

25 - Tulsa, Okla. The dressing room is about 100 ft. from our car not bad, eh! Plenty hot but pretty good lot.

26 - Okmulgee, Okla. Small town, very light matinee. Plenty of big hats in this country. Cars about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

27 - Oklahoma City, Okla. Fair grounds lot. Full house at nite, still plenty warm but I don't seem to mind it any more.

28 - Coffeyville, Kan. Matinee late again starting at 2:45. Nice lot, good business. Dorothy Herbert's horse bit a little boy's ear off, this morning in the pad room. Plenty cool this evening.

29 - Pittsburg, Kan. Nice lot and cool, the first cool one we've had for many a day. Cars near town. Business fair.

30 - Sunday in Kansas City, Mo. Our first Sun. off in six weeks. We went to the Meuhleback Hotel and took it plenty easy. I saw the picture "Anthony Adverse."

31 - Last year we had a flood here and didn't get off the lot until 8 A.M. the next morning. This year the lot is very dusty. The cars are right behind the dressing room and town about 4 miles. I believe the nite show is the biggest house we've had yet. They talk of Nov. 10 closing now, and I imagine that's about right.

September

1 - St. Joseph, Mo. Rain in the morning but cleared off; plenty hot in the big top. Small lot everything crowded in the backyard. Plenty cool at nite.

2 - Shenandoah, Iowa. Nice lot, cars & town both close, plenty cool

3 - Ft. Dodge, Iowa.

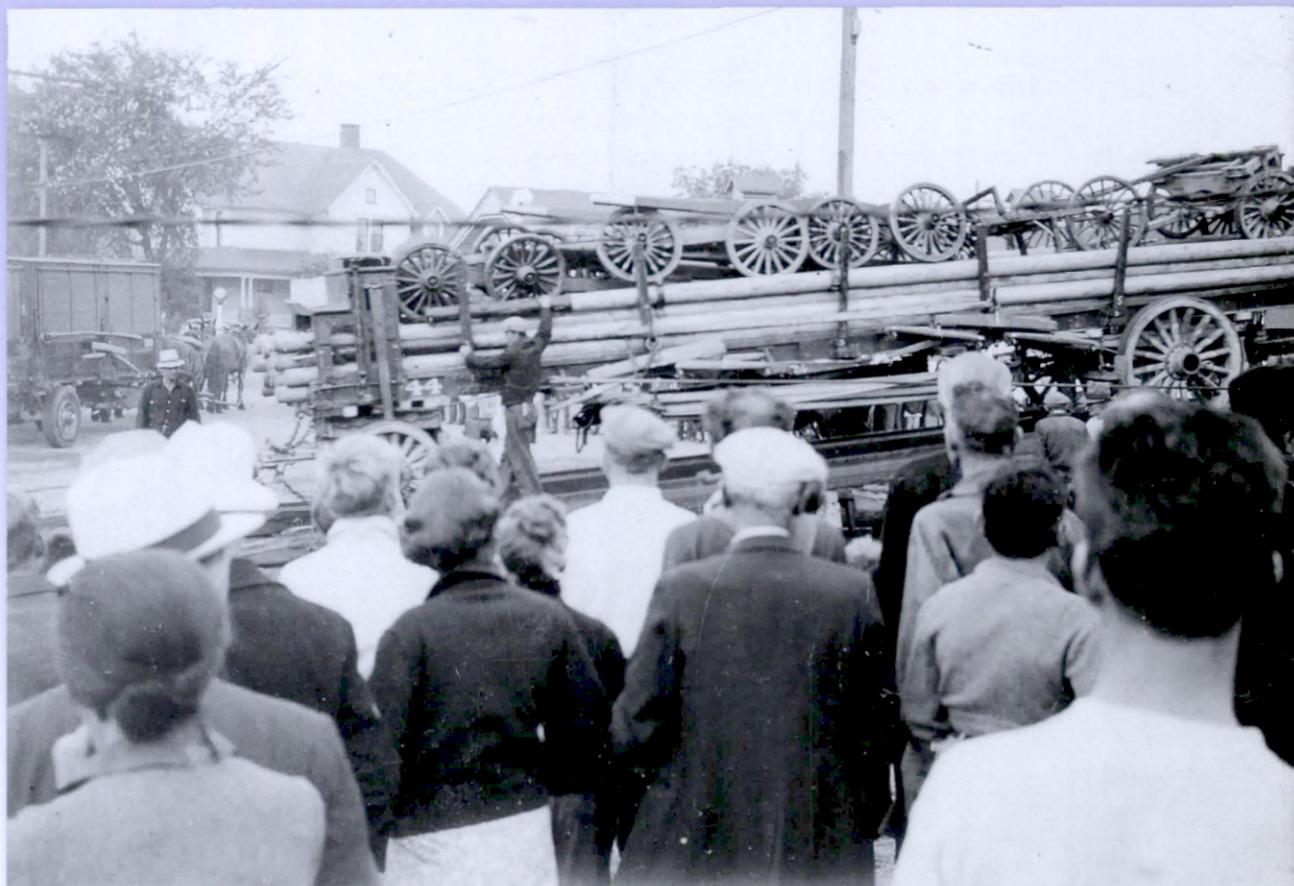
4 - Sioux City, Iowa. Rain all day, plenty of black mud. Business good in spite of the weather.

5 - Omaha, Neb. Nice day and lot, Ak-Sav-Ben field, about 4 miles from town. We went to a little club across from the lot after the show.

6 - Sunday, Omaha. Met Chuck and Crystal at the depot this morning on their way to Portland, Ore. They stopped over 45 minutes. The baby liked the train fine so far. Just as we finished the act this afternoon and were waiting for the announcements a wind came up and we came down, and how! The people all ran out and they didn't even get to shoot the cannon.

7 - Beatrice, Neb. Labor Day. Matinee full house, nice day and lot. Cars and town close to lot.

8 - Topeka, Kan. Business not so good for a city this large. Dressing room in a stock barn. It poured down rain all during the



Ringling-Barnum big top pole wagon coming off the flat car in Appleton, Wisconsin, August 6, 1936. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

nite show, no "spec." Gov. Landon, the Republican candidate for President, was supposed to be here. The Fox movietone men were all set for him but he didn't show up, and I don't blame him, because it really did rain inside as well as out.

9 - Concordia, Kan. Small town, matinee straw house. This is the town that broke the record for attendance in 1924. The uptown district was so crowded at noon you could hardly walk on the sidewalks. People were standing in line in front of the "one" big restaurant, as one came out they let one in, etc.

10 - Emporia, Kan. Pay Day. Coaches right behind dressing room. Business fair.

11 - Wichita, Kan. Very dirty lot made worse by a strong wind blowing all day. Full house at nite. Cars at the depot right in town. Short act this afternoon.

12 - Great Bend, Kan. Small town, business air, showers off and

on all day. Cars and town both near lot.

13 - Enroute. Spent the whole day on the train arriving in Denver at 9:15 P.M. It was a dandy trip, we had plenty to eat and it was nice and cool. We stopped 2 hours in La Junta, Colo. to feed and water.

14 - Denver, Colo. Dusty lot and warm in the afternoon, but plenty cool at nite. Everyone is noticing the high altitude the air is so dry, it makes you gasp for breath, and even though it was warm I perspired very little.

15 - Denver. Plenty cool all day and cold at nite. Matinee light due to V. F. W. parade up town. They are holding their National Convention here this week.

16 - Colorado Springs. Winter is here at last! Plenty of top-coats seen today. Several people went on the sightseeing trips this morning and between shows. Business only fair and I don't blame the people, it's too cold.

17 - Pueblo, Colo. Fine to-day I guess the winter was a false alarm. Pay Day to-day and that helps. I played baseball yesterday and I'm so sore to-day I can hardly walk. Cars near town.

18 - Garden City, Kan. Small town business not so hot. We made a very good run into here 216 miles and the show was ready in time for 1:00 P.M. doors. Plenty cool at nite.

19 - Dodge City, Kan. Fairgrounds lot near town and cars. Our rigging buckled this afternoon just after we got down, but we have it fixed in time for the nite show. Very good house this afternoon.

20 - Sunday off. Enid, Okla. In town at 3:30 P.M. We went to two shows and home to bed. Willie Otari fell off the train last nite, they brought him here in an ambulance this morning. He's not hurt bad though, just a lot of cuts and scratches, he's plenty lucky because the train really did roll last nite.

21 - Enid, Okla. Rained a little in the morning but cleared off nice. We had a ball game between shows, I turned my ankle the first time up to bat now I can hardly walk; isn't that nice? Willie Otari is

coming along O.K. I guess his face is cut up pretty bad.

22 - Clinton, Okla. Rain and plenty of it. About 3 taxis in town, the lot 1½ miles, no raincoat and I can hardly walk. But we made it.

23 - Chickasha, Okla. Late, 4:15 matinee, the (sic) had to hook rope all the wagons on the lot, they all went to the axles, but a beautiful day so that helped. I'm writing this at 10 P.M. and it's pouring down rain again.

24 - Wichita Falls, Tex. Late, 4:30 P.M. matinee. Nice day. Cars and town close.

25 - Ardmore, Okla. Matinee on time to-day and it didn't start to rain until 7:30 P.M. The lot is plenty soft and will be bad to get off. They haven't enough horses for this kind of weather and the trucks are useless.

26 - Paris, Tex. So this is Paris!! Pouring down again, but a good, hard lot. Just as they got the Big Top off the ground it really did rain for about fifteen minutes and then burst, now the Big Top has about a dozen holes that you could ride a horse thru. Anyway we got thru the matinee.

We thot (sic) it had been raining all day but about 7:30 P.M. it was a regular cloud burst. The bad part of it is it's raining nearly as hard in the Big Top and Dressing room as outside so there's nothing to do but get wet and stay that way. We waded thru six inches of water to get to the back door and finally got up and did one trick. By this time there is a foot of water all over the lot so there's nothing to do but dive in.

27 - Dallas, Tex. Arrived about noon, still raining and they say no show to-day. So we get to town and the hotel and stayed there until it finally quit raining about 5:30 P.M. the papers are now full of stories about the floods, all over the state so it doesn't look so good.

28 - Dallas. We heard last nite that we might leave around noon to-day, so we went to the train and sure enough they were loading up. Reiner was at the cars. I don't know what he's been doing, and he



Ringling-Barnum personnel assembling in the back yard, getting ready for spec at Madison, Wisconsin, August 4, 1936. Note beautiful elephant blankets. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

didn't seem to know what he's going to do. It's not raining anymore and about 6:30 P.M. we're off for Tyler.

29 - Tyler, Texas. We got in town about 7 A.M. It's a nice day and the lot is perfectly dry. It looks as if every garment on the show is hanging out to dry and it's a perfect day for it. They had trouble with the Big Top it had shrunk so much it wouldn't lace up around the poles. Cowl O'Connell one of the 24 hour men and a very good friend of ours, dropped dead in this town yesterday.

30 - Waco, Tex. Well this was the worst flooded area but one would never know it. Two very good houses and the lot is high and dry. Clyde O'Neil, a bar performer and friend of ours, who lives here, is having us out for night lunch to-nite.

October

1 - Austin, Tex. Nice day and lot. George Stantz visited this afternoon. Cars in town. Pay Day.

2 - San Antonio, Tex. Fine Day lot about 3 miles from town. Business good. The annual Hot Tamale Party to-nite at the cars, given by the Circus Fans. I walked thru the Mexican section this morning, it really is like a foreign country.

3 - Corpus Christi, Tex. Nice day, lot one mile from town. They have about 1400 new oil wells in and around this town and there is supposed to be plenty of money. Business good.

4 - Sun. Houston, Tex. Texas State Hotel, quiet day, we went to see "Ramona" in the evening and home to bed.

5 - Houston. Nice lot about three miles from town. The Giants surprised everyone and won the 5th game of the world series. The fruit cake man from Corsicana is here to-day. They "turned 'em away" to-nite. The S.S. Giant fell and broke his arm.

6 - Houston. The "Yanks" won to-day giving them the series. Nice

day, very warm at nite in the cars.

7 - Galveston, Tex. Raining! Lot very muddy, especially the cook house. No spec at nite, business light. This is the first time the show has been here for about 10 years.

8 - Beaumont, Tex. Late! 4:15 matinee. Fairgrounds lot about three miles from town. An elephant killed a man in the car this morning when they were unloading. I guess they're not going to do anything to the "Bull" as he didn't really "go bad."

9 - Lafayette, La. Nice day, lot right by cars, town four blocks. Business good. Big City tomorrow.

10 - New Orleans, La. Cookhouse just one block from our car when I got up but now they have moved them. We went to town at nite, had shrimp and went to a little nite club, "the Dog House."

11 - New Orleans. Nice Day, full house in the afternoon, light at nite. I'll be glad to get out of here.

12 - Mobile, Ala. Nice day, but plenty cool at nite. The Beagles, friends of ours from Michigan, were here for a little while to-day. Good house at nite.

13 - Montgomery, Ala. We made a very good 187 mile run last nite and the matinee started on time. Another elephant man got killed at the runs last nite by a train. Business good.

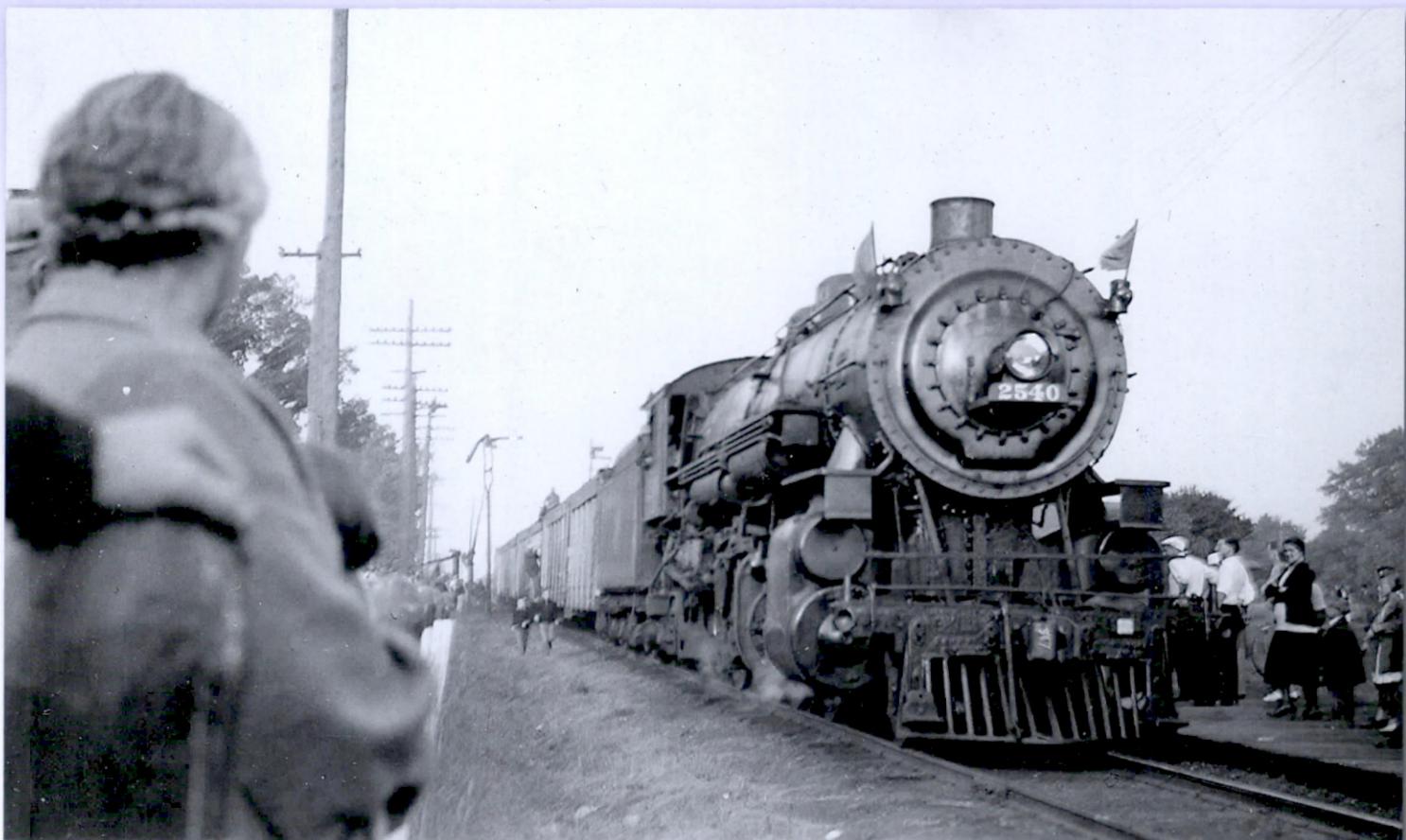
14 - Selma, Ala. This is not much of a town, business very light. Nice lot and not nearly as cool to-nite as it has been.

15 - Birmingham, Ala. Cloudy, cool day. Rain at nite. Business very good. The big iron man that used to be here on the lot has been moved somewhere up in the mountains.

16 - Gadsden, Ala. Rain in the morning but cleared off nice. Very muddy lot about one mile from town.

17 - Tuscaloosa, Ala. Nice day, business fair, cars close to lot at nite.

The Ringling-Barnum train, Appleton, Wisconsin, August 6, 1936. Sverre O. Braathen photo.



18 - Sun. Memphis, Tenn. Got in town at 3 P.M. Grayce had her Club Dinner at the Peabody Hotel. The entire show was invited to the Warner Theatre free of charge. We went home to the cars about 11 P.M.

19 - Memphis. Warm day but cool at nite. Good fairgrounds lot. Business good. I won a cigarette case and lighter on a Menage Club Punch board.

20 - Jackson, Tenn. Fairgrounds lot, cars only about 4 blocks. Fine day, cool at nite.

21 - Nashville, Tenn. Fine day, I went to the "Y" this morning. Agnes Meyer visited in the afternoon with her little boy, also the State Farm Insurance men that handled the accident last winter. Business very good.

22 - Chattanooga, Tenn. Rain all afternoon and evening. Cars only about 4 blocks from lot. A big top boy got stabbed in the back and had his money taken from him.

23 - Knoxville, Tenn. I went to the "Y" this morning and had a nice bath and swim. Rain in the forenoon gave us a light matinee.

24 - Bristol, Tenn.-Va. Late!! Matinee started at 5 P.M. The bandmen only had about 15 minutes off between the Wild West and the first overture. Very hilly, soft lot, all the wagons had to be hook roped on the lot. Half of this town is Tennessee and half Virginia.

25 - Sunday. Asheville, N.C. Very cool day we stayed at the Hotel Langren, and I saw one picture.

26 - Asheville, N.C. Very miserable day cold and raining, Matinee light, evening good.

27 - Winston-Salem, N.C. Boy!! Cold weather and how, everyone has overcoats on, in fact I'm so cold right now I can hardly write this. Ed Rooney accidentally got hit in the nose by one of the Otari boys, he isn't working tonite. Lucky guy in a way I would say.

28 - Danville, Va. Still plenty cold, they say it snowed here yesterday. Very good matinee. I don't know where they all came from. There are plenty of fires in the dressing room so it's not so bad in here. A little rain after the show.

29 - Greensboro, N.C. Cold, but not as bad as the last two days. The fair just finished here Saturday consequently business only fair. Still plenty of charcoal fires so it's not so bad I guess we can take it. One good thing we're going South all the time. Pay Day but next week is the big one (Two in one).

30 - Raleigh, N.C. Cold! We're getting a little accustomed to it now I guess, but I still wear all the clothes I can find. The cars were parked next to the wall of the N.C. State Prison. I bought a ring thru the bars from a "lifer."

31 - Wilson, N.C. Same thing, cold! The ménage club finally put on their play, after several postponements, it was a howling success.

November

1 - Charlotte, N.C. Sun. Fine warm day at last, maybe the cold wave is over. No picture shows to-day so it's rather quiet. We stopped at the Mayfair Hotel.

2 - Charlotte. Another nice day, it surely is a welcome change. Grayce has a bad hip she's been uptown twice to the doctor, he has it taped

now.

3 - Greenville, S.C. Cars only about three blocks from a rough lot. Grayce hip is still pretty bad. This is election Day-Landon vs. Roosevelt, it looks like an easy victory for Roosevelt.

4 - Atlanta, Geo. Cold and Rainy, a very miserable day. The greatest landslide in history for Roosevelt. If he gives us four more years of action like the last, the country will either be a lot better off or ruined, and you can't blame a man for making mistakes when he



The always-photogenic Dorothy Herbert at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, August 5, 1936. Three weeks later her horse bit off the ear of a little boy. Sverre O. Braathen photo.



Billboard for pigmy elephant feature on show in 1936. Sverre O. Braathen photo.

(sic) trying.

5 - Atlanta. Cool but a nice clear day. Grayce's sister Eva visited, she is working 20 miles from here. Fried chicken in the cookhouse to-day. Hurray!

6 - Macon, Georgia. Good fairgrounds lot, ½ mile from town, a little rain in the evening. We lost an hour in the time change this morning.

7 - Valdosta, Geo. Cool cloudy day, nice lot about two miles from town. Several more cars added to the "fifth" section. The matinee was light, this is [not] much of a town. Boy! The days are getting fewer and fewer, we go into Florida to-night. I don't mind closing but I surely hate to think of going North into that cold and snow.

8 - Sun. Jacksonville, Fla. Cloudy day but warm, we didn't go to the hotel but went to a couple of shows and home about 10:30. This is a very nice town.

9 - Jacksonville. Nice warm day, matinee very light. To-day is the last and biggest pay day, the last three days, the hold-back and for the three extra days. We are all paid up now but no one will leave you can depend on that, they might want to come back again sometime. The "fifth" section took on about 4 more cars here. Grayce has gone to town to do some last minute shopping.

10 - Orlando, Fla. Fine day, just like summer. Matinee started a few minutes late. Charley Siegrist here for the nite show. I sure wish

we were going to stay down here a while, but no such luck. Ice tea in the cook-house, can you imagine that?

11 - Tampa, Fla. Well this is the day we were afraid was coming, and a beautiful one at that. Armistice Day and the matinee is a turn away. One surely wouldn't think of closing a day like this. Orville Lindeman is here but he didn't bring Venna. The backyard is full of visitors from Sarasota and here, real estate men, automobile salesmen, Railroad men, actors children that they haven't seen all season, people from the Royal American Shows, cars and trailers and what not. Walter Guice lives two blocks from here, he will have his bar riggings and horses in the barn before the show is over. Harry and Joe Rutley had breakfast at home this morning; and we still have 1200 miles to go, oh! We (sic) varied is the life of circus performers. As to the weather it has been a season of extremes ranging from 142 degrees in the "Big Top" to a few degrees above freezing, floods in Texas to parched crops in Kansas but as the old circus saying goes:

Whether it's cold or

Whether it's hot

We'll weather the weather

Whether or not.

So Long, Good-bye and Good Luck. I'll see you next year in the Garden. I hope. Harold (Tuffy) Genders. BW

Everyone Has a Story: Circus As Autobiographical Subject

by Mort Gamble

This article was originally presented at the joint conference of the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association in San Antonio, Texas, April 22, 2011.

From the days of P. T. Barnum to current times, circus people have written autobiographies, providing glimpses of the private face of their public world. This paper will examine the contributions of selected circus autobiographies to appreciation and understanding of how the genre called autobiography tells its own version of the truth about the circus as an entertainment medium and cultural tradition.

Over the years, the circus has been captured from different autobiographical perspectives. Memorable autobiographies have been written or authorized by Ringling equestrian director Fred Bradna; the tramp clown Emmett Kelly; circus veterinarian Dr. J. Y. Henderson; high-wire patriarch Karl Wallenda; and, of course, wild animal trainer Clyde Beatty. One of the more entertaining autobiographies of the 1960s was *The Circus Kings: Our Ringling Family Story* by Henry Ringling North (1960). Co-authored with Alden Hatch, the book remains a lively treatment of the band of brothers from Baraboo and their frequently quarreling descendants. In his memoir, North becomes an apologist for his brother John whose decision to end abruptly at Pittsburgh in mid-season the under-canvas era of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey remains controversial.

Brother "Buddy" defends the move as a foregone financial conclusion which was "written in the ledgers" of the circus years before that troubled season of 1956, and most likely it was. Less likely is North's image of his brother presiding from "his private box" over the final big top performance, already imagineering the future of the show as an indoor production. At least one circus writer and critic, David Lewis Hammarstrom, has stated that John North, at that historic moment, was sequestered in his private rail car, the *Jomar*, conducting a lonely wake not only for his big top but for the tented circus industry in general, which North had stated in his Pittsburgh press release was, in his opinion, "a thing of the past."

Whoever said that autobiographies were meant to tell the whole truth?

Like certain tell-all Hollywood autobiographies, some more recent circus memoirs have presented the non-glamorous, even brutal side of show business. These works show the vulnerability of circus personalities, the human frailties and failings, the backyard conflicts—in short, the circus as a society and business both ordered and unstable, viewed through a highly personal lens.

Three works are examined here. First is the chapter devoted to a short, unhappy circus career as described in the memoir by former Ringling, CBS-TV, New York Yankees, and Madison Square Garden executive Michael Burke in *Outrageous Good Fortune* (1984). Burke, now deceased, served as the executive director/general manager of The Greatest Show on Earth during its final two seasons as a tent show, 1955-56. Judging from Burke's own self-assessment in his book—a circus executive singularly lacking in circus experience

in an enterprise where outsiders are viewed with suspicion—one concludes it was an assignment that he was highly unqualified for.

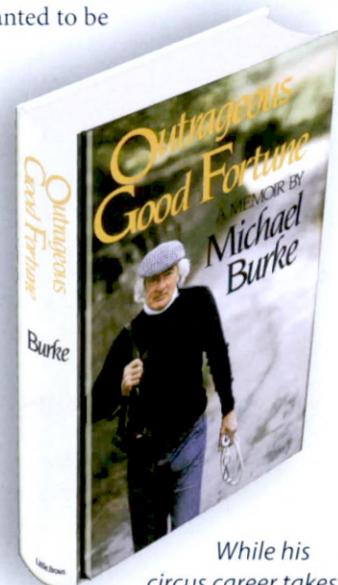
At first, he revels in the rugged, earthy romance of circus life: "The Circus held out the kind of life that excited me. I did not want to be an observer; I wanted to be in the game, whatever it was. . . . I

first saw the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus under a blue sky and brilliant February sun. It was spread over the two-hundred-acre Winter Quarters and in the full sway of rehearsal for its new season, all color and movement and unlike anything on earth. I walked the grounds picking up its electric theatricality, thrilled by its rich sweat and muscle: fragments of different languages, splashes of color, the new sounds of a snapping whip, a bear's growl, a tiger pissing straight back, splattering a wall. I decided at once I was going to like this."

An efficiency-minded circus outsider—a well-tailored First of May—Burke soon discovers, however, that the circus is one million dollars in debt, requiring an advance against its upcoming Madison Square Garden date just to be transported to its opening stand in New York. More ominously, he runs afoul of the tightly controlled hierarchy of what he portrays in his book as circus conspirators. This "Sneeze Mob," he writes, were the road managers who operated and financially benefited from various internal enterprises, such as gambling and liquor, on the big show. Burke tells manager Frank McClosky that "money is running down a hundred rat holes," and announces to management that there must be changes. Burke's driver, Toto, meanwhile warns him to watch himself on the lot, lest a loosened quarter pole land on him in the big top.

Burke and the circus lurch on to disaster. Ultimately, he takes on the Teamsters Union whose president, James Hoffa, vows to put the circus out of business unless it agrees to a union contract. North and Burke refuse. When the show finally did close in Pittsburgh in July of 1956 after a series of calamities, man-made and natural, Burke's big top career folded as well. Promised severance from John Ringling North was never paid in full and yet, as in *The Circus Kings*, Burke as author is sympathetic to North's decision to send the big show indoors: "The Circus of the Ringlings, of Phineas T. Barnum and James Bailey was no longer viable. . . . Time and progress, with a violent assist from Hoffa, had torn a vivid strand from the fabric of America . . . it was a delusion to think that a three-ring circus playing under a big canvas tent, traveling the country in an 80 car train was viable in 1956. It simply was not."

One is left with the impression that Burke wished he had come to the world of the circus when it was at the top of its game, during its so-called "golden age"—pre-TV, pre-unions, pre-metaphorical connotations. Instead, he joined the old-fashioned tent tradition at a perilous moment in its history, referring later in the book to his "frenetic Circus existence." In his biography of John Ringling



While his circus career takes up only one chapter in his book, Michael Burke's narrative of his days on Ringling-Barnum is an important account.

North, Ernest Albrecht comments that Burke's major failing was not lack of circus experience; it was lack of John Ringling North experience, "rubbing Johnny's nose in the sordid details of circus life which Johnny normally sailed above by pretending they didn't exist. [Arthur] Concello had always allowed Johnny this luxury. Now Burke left him no alternative. The only way he could finally escape all the dirty little dilemmas Burke kept bringing him was by chucking it all and closing the circus down."

Burke was a well-meaning circus outsider. An insider's perspective on the circus is bound to be different. In her 2007 memoir, *Spangles, Elephants, Violets & Me: The Circus Inside Out*, Victoria Cristiani Rossi of the Cristiani riding act family offers eyewitness testimony to the complex world of the circus—a world she regards with "near-mystical reverence."

Her prose evokes scenes rapidly receding into memory. The big top rises "majestically, like a grand old friend." Clowns are "fastidious," adorned in "hallucinogenic" wardrobe. One of the

Cristiani's handsome horses is "circus-poster perfect." Elephants, prehistoric stars of the menagerie, "[demand] acknowledgment of their importance."

A product of the circus, Vickie admires its resplendent but all-too-human society, its pageantry and professionalism, and mourns the passing of pre-suburban America in which big shows flourished. She is also aware of the big top's "naughty" side; the circus is a flawed thing of beauty, a place of "oneness and madness." The menagerie and donniker tents reek. Performers can be heroic and petty. Workingmen wear "faces carved out of poverty, guilt, and booze." She recounts her family's tempestuous internal

conflicts, triumphs and struggles, and adventures as circus owners, who remained "[loyal] to the canvas sky" amid shifting public taste in popular entertainment.

Hers is a story of the American dream on wheels, the confluence of wealth and fame, the strength and frailty of family, social and economic ambition, misplaced trust, conflict, loss and redemption. It is a story, too, of her own search for the "violets" in her life, a secret place of spiritual and emotional enrichment where even her beloved circus does not intrude, and of her triumph over a career-ending accident in the ring. Vickie builds dramatic contrast between days spent happily on the circus lot as a child, and haunting nights



Vickie Cristiani with Tony Diano's elephant Tommy on her family's Cristiani Bros. Circus in 1958. Cliff Glotzbach photo, Pfening Archives.



Victoria Cristiani Rossi's book is an insider's record of the Cristiani Bros. Circus in the 1950s.

spent away from it. The author gives us a view of "a closed society" few are privileged to see firsthand, let alone be able to call their own. She allows the circus to be what it was, and is—an amazing, complex community and a place of enduring entertainment and fascination.

Jamie MacVicar's *The Advance Man*, a 2010 memoir about promoting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey during the Irvin Feld era, describes vividly the duality of a circus advance man's existence. MacVicar's book cover itself suggests ambiguity—a well-tailored business figure, back to the viewer, coat slung over his shoulder, briefcase in hand, staring down from a hillside at a picturesque village in the distance below. Is he anticipating "capturing" this new town for the circus, or wistfully regretting that he cannot truly live there? Is he eagerly looking ahead in his life or sadly behind? Or, as the author suggests later in the book, is he at heart a happy refugee from all things

predictable and stationary?

The daily existence of an advance man, according to MacVicar, leaves little time for that kind of personal reflection. At the age of 22 in the 1970s, as a Feld trainee, MacVicar soon becomes obedient to the relentless scheduling, mailing, telephoning, faxing, calculating, tallying, projecting, analyzing, bargaining, and manipulating that ensure box-office success on circus day. He becomes a PR performer trained in multi-tasking without a net.

MacVicar offers a contextual synopsis of the evolution of The Greatest Show on Earth to that new identity; by the 1950s, he recounts, the Ringling big top was losing money, ready for its next managerial act—control by Irvin Feld. For the Washington, D.C.-based Feld organization, the modern circus required reinventing, its legendary spectacle reformatted for air-conditioned arenas. The name of the game was branding and marketing, from the concessions down to the cost basis of every last seat in any given venue.

At the heart of the memoir is the endless organizational detail of a traveling circus that someone has to attend to, from counting tickets to driving advance clowns around to assisted-laughing facilities to marking performers' dressing areas with tape at 5:00 in the morning. The story is punctuated by anecdotes of many of the great names of the period like Gunther Gebel-Williams, Prince Paul, Rudy Lenz, and Charley Baumann. Promoters, we learn, have a ringside take on celebrities. Michu refuses a reporter's question about the sex life of a Lilliputian. White-haired Hollywood legend Cary Grant maneuvers to get in the show for free. A planned photo-op with superstar Gunther goes awry, turning into a security debacle.

MacVicar's story comes together because of its buttoned-down appeal, its nod to the temperamental, unpredictable, and insatiable nature of circus existence, and its portrait of a life lived on the edge—the advance—of a surprisingly fragile enterprise that is dependent on the work of a few solitary, motivated professionals working out of windowless offices. It is not a glamorous career. MacVicar's references to the Roman Coliseum bring to mind the true nature of a promoter's existence: within the bowels of a great

edifice reside spirited creatures—in this case, advance men—whose fate, like that of the ancient gladiators, awaits upstairs for all to see.

As one of his mentors tells him at the start of his career, “Wait until it’s only you, and you’re all alone in a city for weeks before the circus arrives. It’s a whole different story.”

MacVicar, like Burke and Cristiani Rossi, finds that his life comes to be defined by the physical and emotional demands of circus obligations. Circus life is enchanting but hard. There is loneliness, estrangement. The authors, vaulting from the highs of escaping normalcy to the lows of yearning for it, are survivors.

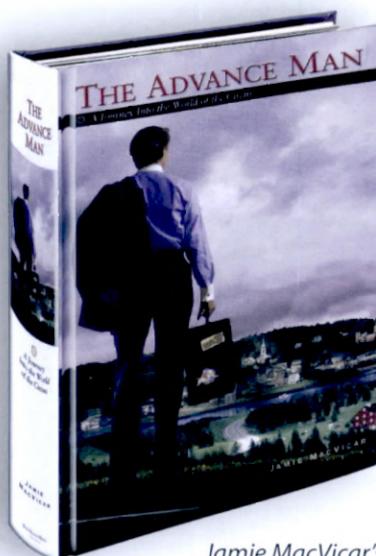
What and how do these works contribute to understanding of circus as an entertainment medium and cultural tradition? What truths do they tell?

These memoirs focus on a period in circus history, 1955-1975, in which the circus was well removed from its “golden age.” The competition for the American entertainment dollar had intensified; public taste was shifting toward other forms of amusement. No longer the premiere entertainment event it once was, the circus fought for economic survival and cultural relevance. This intensified the pressure on its loyal subjects—Burke, Rossi, and MacVicar—and others who labored long hours to keep their circuses viable.

The best memoirs, on any subject, are more than a series of historical incidents and personal anecdotes. For these three authors, the circus is an irresistibly perilous place, as fraught with danger behind the scenes as atop the high wire or inside the steel arena. That is part of the circus’s rough charm, its hazardous allure, its fuel for memoirs. Organizationally, the circus is demanding. These authors wrestle with the object of their respect and loyalty, which somehow “holds back” some of its rewards to them, as the circus business once did portions of its salary to the workingmen so they would make the full season. In the circus, the individual, no matter how heroic, is subsumed under the relentless routine of honoring dates and adhering to routes, giving a show under sometimes impossible conditions, and moving on with minimal opportunities for reflection. What remains is the opportunity for resurrection—regurgitation?—of self through recollection and memoir.

Sharing one’s circus life is perilous, too, however. No one can fully appreciate what circus life is, or what it means, unless one has been “with it” for years and survived. Moreover, the mysterious nature of circus life does not always translate well as a story for mass audiences—unless it’s *Water for Elephants*, of course.

The authors cited here are expert storytellers. Although only a chapter in his colorful career, Burke’s circus section offers a vividly told impression of the haunting last days of the Ringling big top—a source of enduring interest especially for those of us who never saw The Greatest Show on Earth under canvas. Vickie Rossi’s narrative suggests parallels with one’s notion of a good Hollywood memoir: a childhood perhaps spent joyfully roaming the studio back lot only to be confronted by complexity and uncertainty in interactions with adults, with the greatest drama to be found not in the performances the audience sees but in the discovery of personal inner truths unknown and irrelevant to an easily distracted public. MacVicar, the advance man, remains in awe of the show, loving what he does, but is unafraid to take the reader down the long and sometimes



Jamie MacVicar's book is a rarity, a memoir by a non-performer who travels ahead of the show.

dark corridor of memory into a bright arena in search of the glittering destination of the circus itself. His book also serves as a primer for Marketing 101; indeed, the author has been approached by business educators who see in his memoir a unique form of college textbook.

For all three authors discussed here, the circus has left indelible impressions on their sensibilities. For them, the circus as an institution is also highly personal—not easily forgotten or understood, a state of mind, a place of contrasts where beauty and rawness seem destined to coexist. Hardly the hottest of show-business topics these days, the circus nevertheless is always worthy of our curiosity and admiring analysis. In the hands of the three authors cited above, the world of the circus not only lives on—it continues to excite. Their descriptions of life in the center ring and backyard go to what Vickie Rossi calls “the inner core of the operation,”

where the inspiring public strength of performers co-exists with their personal human frailty, where everyone—even stars of the menagerie—seems to have an ego, and where the highest-flying stars and the roughest characters of the circus alike must obey the regimentation of life on the road, away from the “normal”, drawn irresistibly to the brightest and happiest of asylums.

Burke writes: “At times . . . I allowed myself to slip into a solitary vagabond role, alone and unlonely, adrift in a world apart . . . it was inescapably romantic to be sliding through the night on a circus train loaded with six hundred circus animals and eight hundred circus people. The Circus, someone said, was ‘a bright spangled girl with a date in another town a hundred miles away tomorrow morning.’ But I was traveling with her to our date in the next town.” BW

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Deco Darlings

Circus, Showgirls, and Big Top Fashions

by Jennifer Lemmer Posey

1925 to 1940

From Ziegfeld's "American Girls" to the Rockettes, no figure is as closely tied to the aesthetic of the Art Deco era as the showgirl. These alluring girls who became iconic figures of the American circus in the 1920s and 1930s were a departure from the dancers that traveled with circuses in the age of Barnum. The impresarios of the late nineteenth century pioneered large scale theatrical spectacles with interludes of dance performed by a corps of young women garbed in modest calf-length gowns and men in tunics and tights. Like supporting dancers in operas, ballets and theatrical productions, these chorines generally performed as a single choreographed unit at specific moments during the overall production. Their performances enhanced the already overtly theatrical character of spectacles such as *Columbus*, and their sheer numbers (seventy-two members of the ballet for the *Columbus* spec were listed in the 1893 Barnum & Bailey Route Book) were exploited to advertise the size, and therefore quality, of the show itself.



Bird Millman was featured at the New York Hippodrome, Ziegfeld's Follies and other revues during the circus' off season. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

By the 1920s the Ringling show placed less focus on the production numbers and more on the actual circus acts. Grand entrées and other productions were populated with bodies that performed in other capacities with the show—gone were the dedicated dancers.

It is interesting to note the full circle of the influences the Follies and other theatrical entertainments drew from the circus, featuring stars like Bird Millman, and likewise the circus drew from the revues, highlighting the showgirls in the specs. In the first decades of the century, Ziegfeld almost single-handedly recreated the showgirl into the enviable image of modernity. Interspersing the dancers with a variety of other acts helped transform what was essentially burlesque into a more sanitized, albeit still titillating, entertainment that was palatable to men and women alike.¹ Highlighting a performer's body through lightweight, clinging fabrics and glittering details added to the air of glamour surrounding the girls. In his study of the impact of New York night-



May Wirth's girlish costume made her remarkable bareback accomplishments even more crowd-pleasing. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

life of this era, Lewis Erenberg makes the interesting observation that prior to Ziegfeld, theatrical chorines, or dancers, were generally selected due to their bulk. In this way, the fleshier shapes of the pre-1910 dancers marked them most specifically as adult women, whereas the taller, more slender lines of the women employed in the revues of the 1920s made age more ambiguous. This change in body type was perfectly aligned with the notion of the modern girl as a symbol of youth and possibility and as an icon of Jazz Age culture.²

The emphasis on youth was not new to the circus, where many

performers played up youthfulness to an extreme in order to add to the allure of their performance. May Wirth's remarkable somersaults and leaps seemed all the more impressive to an unknowing audience who perceived the girl with a sweet, simple riding gown and a large bow on her head to be younger than she was in reality. In such cases, youthful appearance was used to draw attention to skill, rather than to create an eroticized stereotype. Although the nature of performance wardrobe had always allowed social norms of propriety to be loosened, with the birth of the Deco era's modern girl, circuses were able to actually emphasize the revealing nature of many costumes. In the 1930s the sleek lines of the Art Deco style brought an aesthetically streamlined look to American circuses, starting with the look of the showgirls.

The multi-talented circus showgirl that emerged in the Deco age performed in walk around productions like the grand entrée, manège or web and often also filled spots in a variety of acts such as the elephant displays, or even flying trapeze. The girls that were included in Ella Bradna's Act Beautiful exemplify the early version of the circus showgirl, serving primarily as decorative

adopting new technologies and featuring attractions and fashions that were often ahead of their time. In terms of wardrobe choices, the American circus has always needed to strike a careful balance between fashion trends, social conventions of proper attire and the realistic needs of athletic bodies performing amazing feats of flexibility, strength, and speed. From the nineteenth century forward, these same factors were also important to the staging of ballet, theater and other popular amusements, and the movements of producers and designers between all of these entertainments demonstrate that at one time American culture was not so fixated on judging some arts as more esteemed than others. During the American Jazz Age, performing arts all benefited from the fashion trends that freed the body for a wide range of movement.

Circus wardrobe styles are constantly evolving with the times. The shift in costume styles from Victorian to Deco began before any officially recognized dates of either the Jazz Age or the Art Deco era. The costumes of the nineteenth century were generally created out of heavy, durable materials like muslins, velvet and sometimes the more lavish silks and satins with wool jersey used for stockings and



The Act Beautiful starring Ella Bradna, left of the horse in this 1928 photo, was a fixture on the Barnum and Bailey and later Ringling-Barnum. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Glasier Glass Plate Negative Collection.

props to frame the star and her trained animals as they moved through a series of poses. While the early costumes actually made the women into birds, in 1926 stylized and streamlined costumes, reminiscent of designs for Parisian dance halls, merely alluded to avian characters with their whimsical feathered skirts.³ The broad skirts, constructed of feathery boas and fitted sequined bodices, transformed the girls into delicate birds, foreshadowing the whimsical transformations that Miles White would design decades later.

The showgirl, a figure that quickly paired with the clown to become icons of circus visual vocabulary, was a symbol of modernization; the youth and beauty of the young girls on display demonstrated the newness and quality of new productions. The circus as a social institution has always been "modern," constantly

undershirts. Those elaborately tailored styles of the Victorian period altered and obscured the lines of the performers' bodies, creating feminine silhouettes with highly cinched waists and enhanced hips and chests. Equestriennes and wire walkers generally wore full, knee length skirts, giving a wide range of mobility and freedom from tripping hazards while still maintaining an appropriate modesty and femininity. Women who performed in aerial acts or ground acts that involved tumbling wore short skirted outfits or elaborately ruffled pantaloons, again emphasizing the wide hips and small waist. Even male performers wore costumes that divided the natural lines of the body, with short, full pantaloons or skirts often colored to highly contrast with the more flesh toned stockings that covered them from the shoulders down.

By the 1880s, the extreme hourglass shapes of the female bodies



In their bloomers and blouses, the Kaufmanns epitomized the image of the New Woman while on Ringling Bros. in 1905. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Glasier Glass Plate Negative Collection.

had already been significantly reduced as fashions began to use more of the light fabrics, smaller bustles and crinolines that would mark the Edwardian era. Interest in concepts of Physical Culture and the increasing popularity of the bicycle were important factors in the transformation of women's fashions in general. Bloomers and clothing that did not restrict the movement of the body were not merely popular, they were necessary to the way people lived. Performers of all types benefited from this immediately and some, such as the Kaufmanns of trick bicycle fame, became emblematic of the new fashions. The wardrobe of some female performers continued to consist of corsets, with a less cinched fit, but the bottoms became less elaborate, with cleaner A-line skirts and sometimes simple, close fitting shorts. Men's wardrobe consisted of knickerbockers or other short-styled breeches. In truth, by the end of the nineteenth century, the most acrobatic performers had already begun to adopt wardrobe with lines that would eventually be seen in everyday fashions. Leotards and tunic dresses became boxy in shape or simply skimmed the natural curves of the performers' bodies.

As significant circus celebrities began to favor wardrobe of a clean, modern design, the basic stylistic elements of the Art Deco style became fixed in the appearance of the American circus. The streamlined cut of these costumes was first seen in unique wardrobe worn by performers for their own acts and later in the wardrobe issued by the shows for production numbers. The key characteristics of Art Deco fashions were silhouettes based on a tubular or flat geometric shape, construction focused more on draping of lightweight fabrics, with a minimum of tailoring, an emphasis on flashy embellishment with glittering findings placed in bold linear and geometric patterns and the use of large, geometric and glittering accessories such as headpieces and feathered capes or

skirts.

Lillian Leitzel, already credited with extraordinary greatness both in terms of her physical performance and her unrivaled celebrity, was an exceptionally early adopter of the clean lines and simple garments that can clearly be associated with the Deco era. Even in her first year as a center ring attraction with the Ringling show in 1915, Leitzel's short, diaphanous skirts, often worn with tops covered in sequins or rhinestones, gave her a full range of movement and titillated the audience with glimpses of her bare midriff. In the 1926 *Billboard* review a paragraph is given simply to a thorough description of Leitzel's golden wardrobe, including an "abbreviated, distended skirt . . . of gold set on a silver waistband . . . a brassiere bandeau of gold lace and shoulder straps and back latticework of silver braid studded with rhinestones . . ." and "trunks and tights of pale flesh satin."⁴ The simple shape of Leitzel's wardrobe, accentuated with glittering rhinestones, meant that the audience's attention was focused on the shape of her body as it moved through her grueling routine, yet at the same time, the short skirts and straight line silhouette gave her a youthful, girlish persona that de-emphasized her incredible physical strength.

Leitzel's contemporary Bird Millman was also forward thinking in her choice of attire for performing on the wire. Her full skirts made of layers of chiffon or other light, sheer fabrics were often finished with ermine, adding weight to keep the skirt down and emphasizing the luxurious fabrics used. Millman's wardrobe intentionally alluded to the full tutus of prima ballerinas, associating her movements on the wire with other dancers. Such ultra-feminine costumes would remain popular with wirewalkers and bareback riders throughout the twenties and thirties.

Both of these star performers worked venues aside from the traveling circuses. Through associations with New York Hippodrome and the vaudeville circuits as well as theatrical revues, Leitzel and Millman were exposed to the increasingly revealing wardrobes of showgirls



Queen of the Air Lillian Leitzel embraced Deco aesthetics even before the 1920s. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Glasier Glass Plate Negative Collection.

and dancers. The idealized style of the American showgirl coalesced when the *Ziegfeld Follies* first appeared in 1907, presenting a series of performances of music, acting and dance. In this format, audiences were entertained with a combination of satires based on contemporary events and celebrities, and extravagant production numbers that featured an array of young dancers clothed in daring, luxurious, and often revealing modern fashions. A number of successful revues, including *George White's Scandals*, were presented in a similar format throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The American revues found their greatest inspiration in the Parisian music halls, such as the Folies Bergère and the Moulin Rouge, which originated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At the heart of these revues were displays of young, beautiful girls, dressed in revealing costumes, performing lively can-cans or other dances. The costumes for the French music halls moved swiftly from the corsets and crinolines of the Victorian era to the elegant lines and lavish ornamentation of designs by a new generation of artists. Styles ranged from the Oriental styled costumes popularized by the Ballets Russe to the Deco designs of Romaine de Tirtoff, better recognized as Erté, and the pool of young talents associated with the Paris music halls around 1910. Costumes were envisioned as complements to the bodies they covered, or exposed in some cases, and so light fabrics were draped in rich folds that would move with the swirling of the dancer's body. Lavish ornamentation was a staple in the designs for the dance halls and performers seemed to drip with pearls, rhinestones and other sparkling accoutrements. From Paris, designers including the world famous Erté, sold their designs to theatres around the globe. Many of the costumes were fabricated in Paris at the atelier of Max Weldy, the most significant Parisian costumier of the 1920s and, in the

John Ringling North era, the man charged with fabricating costumes for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey shows of the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ As the Art Deco era began in the United States, the visual vocabularies of the Parisian styled and inspired wardrobes of theatrical revues and other burlesque style shows were quickly adapted to the fashions presented under American big tops.

Marking the beginning of a new era in the new Madison Square Garden, the 1926 Ringling show opened its "Charleston circus," with an array of performers and animals clothed in new costumes inspired by the fashions of the modern era.⁶ No doubt in preparation for a new season and a new Garden, the show's grand entrée featured "innumerable innovations including the sumptuous jewel cars . . ." and an array of wardrobe inspired

by such popular entertainments as the *Ziegfeld Follies* and *George White's Scandals*.⁷ Ever modern, the Ringling show had actually embraced the style that would become known as Art Deco before it was even a uniquely recognized aesthetic. The Deco style, liberally combined with other fashion trends of the day, was part of the show's "new glittering raiment", deemed by the *Billboard* review of April 10, 1926 to be part of "a Veritable Work of Genius."⁸ The modern fashion, closely associated with youthful exuberance, sleek silhouettes and geometric and linear decorations, was beautifully suited to the needs of circus performers for both function and flashiness.

In fact, the showgirls of the 1926 Ringling show were transformed into a myriad of whimsical creatures as the grand entrée spec evoked a moving tableau of scenes. Like Ziegfeld's *Follies* and other revues, the spec was a disjointed construction of loosely connected themes and characters from Cleopatra to Cinderella, all held together by the repeating motif of the beautiful jewels; girls wearing tall bejeweled headdresses and simple tunic dresses decorated with sequins in geometric patterns, seated atop the mirrored floats pulled by zebras and other exotic stock. The simplicity of the Jewel Box floats combined with the clean lines of the girls' costumes and the graphic contrasts of the zebra markings obviously imbued the procession with a very modern flavor, an appropriate evolution as the circus opened in the new Garden.

Ironically the layered draping of fabric and a variety of flashy sequins, jewels and other findings that defined the Deco styles adopted for circus production numbers were in some ways antithetical to those styles favored by the athletic performers of the rings and air, who instead embraced simple silhouettes in stretch fabrics with just enough flash of jewels, crystals and metallic braid to keep them interesting. In the 1926 *Billboard* review, a surprising amount of column space is given to the description of performers' wardrobe. Leitzel was described as a "flashing streak of gold" in her golden lace short outfit accentuated with silver braid, while many other female performers opted for silky and shimmering fabrics in shades of white and light pastels. The reviewer praises Ella Bradna's white satin outfit, "gleaming with mirrors and silver fringe" as well as Mabel Stark's "white satin riding habit."⁹ Describing the wardrobe of the star female performers and alluding to others, such as aerialists in "angelic white, with delicate rhinestone tracery forming elaborate designs," the writer painted an image of a show that maintained a high degree of visual coherency throughout the program.¹⁰ Although stars would have



The Jewel Floats made their glittering debut on Ringling-Barnum in 1926 and were used through 1934. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

provided their own wardrobe, these performers, as conscious as the show owners of the fashions of the day, were careful to present themselves in styles that reflected the showgirl aesthetics developed in other forms of entertainment.

The wardrobe created for performers, spectacles and production numbers in the Deco era negotiated a middle ground between the increasingly simple silhouettes of the 1920s to the 1940s and the Orientalist aesthetic that was inspired by the American circus' tradition of bringing exotic and extravagant people, animals and performances to small town America. The move to the clean lines of the Art Deco style was a slow process. While there was an obvious need to assure that shows appeared to be up-to-date in all modern fashions, show owners had to balance financial considerations and audience expectations with rapid change. The tremendous investment of money and other resources in creating production wardrobe meant that those pieces were frequently used for multiple seasons. Examining photographs of circuses over the seasons, such as the E. J. Kelty shots of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows in Madison Square Garden, one can discern the production wardrobe which appears for three or more years in a row. Only as costumes grew too threadbare or simply too outdated did management of the 1920s and 1930s need to replace it. Traveling shows had the obvious advantage that audiences changed over quickly and, interestingly, from *Billboard* reviews it seems that given an annual opportunity, audiences appreciated revisiting old favorites both in terms of acts as well as production elements.

It is nearly impossible to know who designed the wardrobe for traveling shows in the first decades of the twentieth century. Individual acts of the 1920s and 1930s generally provided their own costumes, each created to meet each performer's special needs. Production costumes could have been farmed out and certainly were for Ringling and other large shows. Brooks Costume Company, a theatrical costumier in New York, and Henderson-Ames, a Kalamazoo, Michigan shop that specialized in band uniforms and Masonic costuming, were both known to do business with Ringling in the early part of the century. Circuses had wardrobe departments which certainly managed the seasonal



Costumes for the 1925 Arabia spec on Hagenbeck-Wallace may have been influenced by the harem pants and lampshade tunics popularized by Parisian designer Paul Poiret. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.



Rex De Rosselli's productions were built around the exotic and beautiful showgirls and their extravagant costumes as shown on Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1931. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

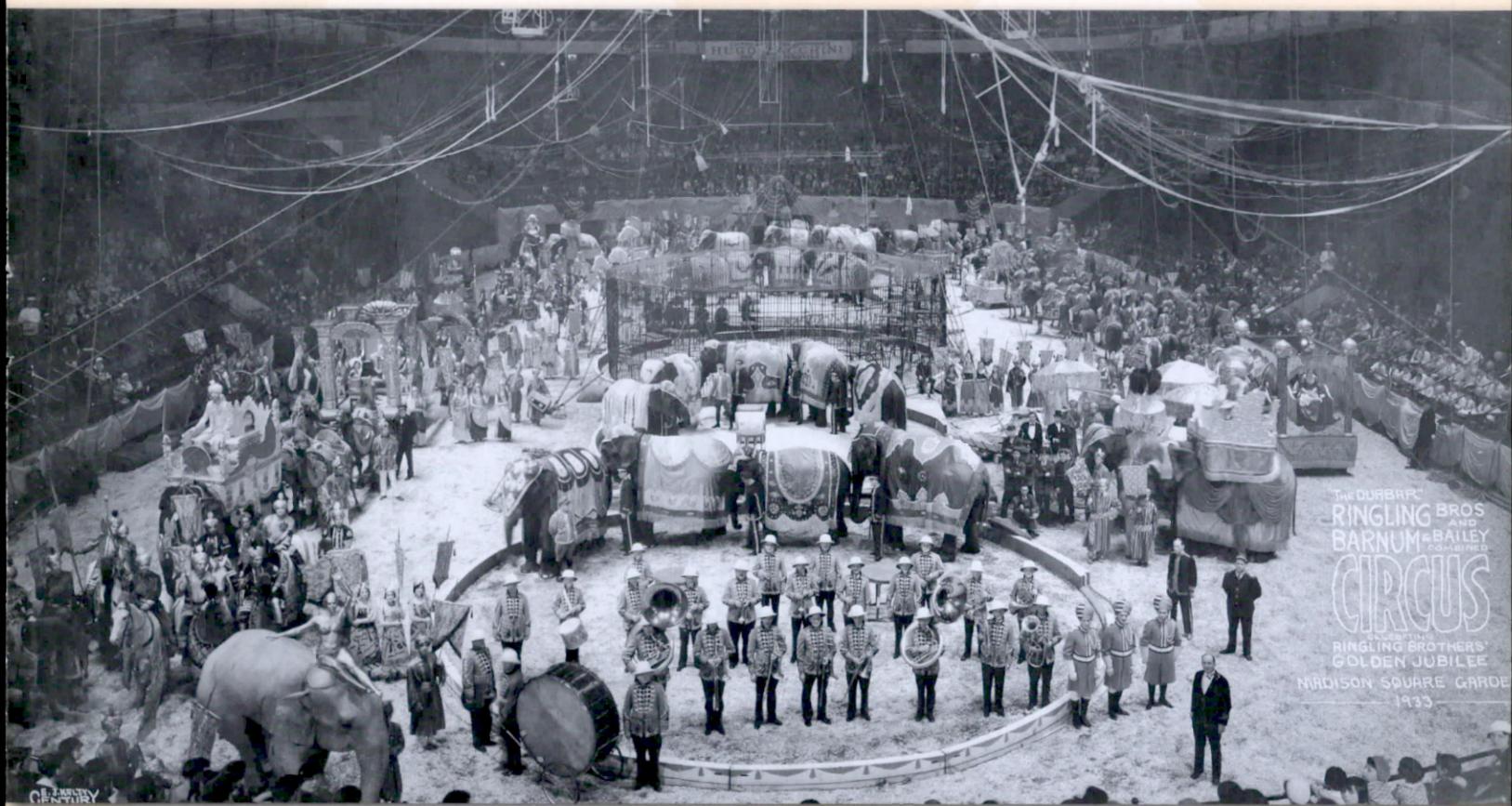
upkeep of costumes and trappings, re-fixing sequins and embellishments and patching areas of high wear, but it is uncertain how much wardrobe was produced in house. It seems likely that animal blankets and associated trappings would have been made internally as few production houses would have had knowledge to fabricate the pieces fitted to animals without having ready access for fittings.

For the most part, the design of production numbers was un-credited during that time also. Without powerful names like Imre Kiralfy and John Rettig, show owners had little reason to credit others for the aesthetic of their shows. Performance directors and show owners would have collaborated to varying degrees to organize the presentations of productions. An interesting exception, Rex De Rosselli, created the Al G. Barnes' spec *Pocahontas in the Court of Queen Anne*, which premiered in 1924 and was performed through the 1927 season. From 1928 to 1934 De Rosselli produced specs for two of the American Circus Corporation shows, John Robinson and Hagenbeck-Wallace. He went on to work with the Cole show until his death in 1941.

In producing the 1924 Al. G. Barnes spec *Pocahontas and the Court of Queen Anne*, De Rosselli may have banked

on his experience in cinema to create a visual spectacle that could compete with movies. The Barnes show may have even leveraged some publicity by advertising his role in creating the spec, as De Rosselli, an animal trainer and circus press agent, had found some success in a cinematic career, appearing in 151 films including *The Man Tamer* (1921) a story set in a circus.¹¹ The cast of the 1922 film *A Dangerous Adventure*, De Rosselli's penultimate cinematic credit, included performer Mabel Stark. Although details of De Rosselli's life are scant, his obituary, re-published in the August-September 1941 *White Tops* indicated that the actor spent three years working for Pathé Films in Asia after his involvement with the Al. G. Barnes show.¹²

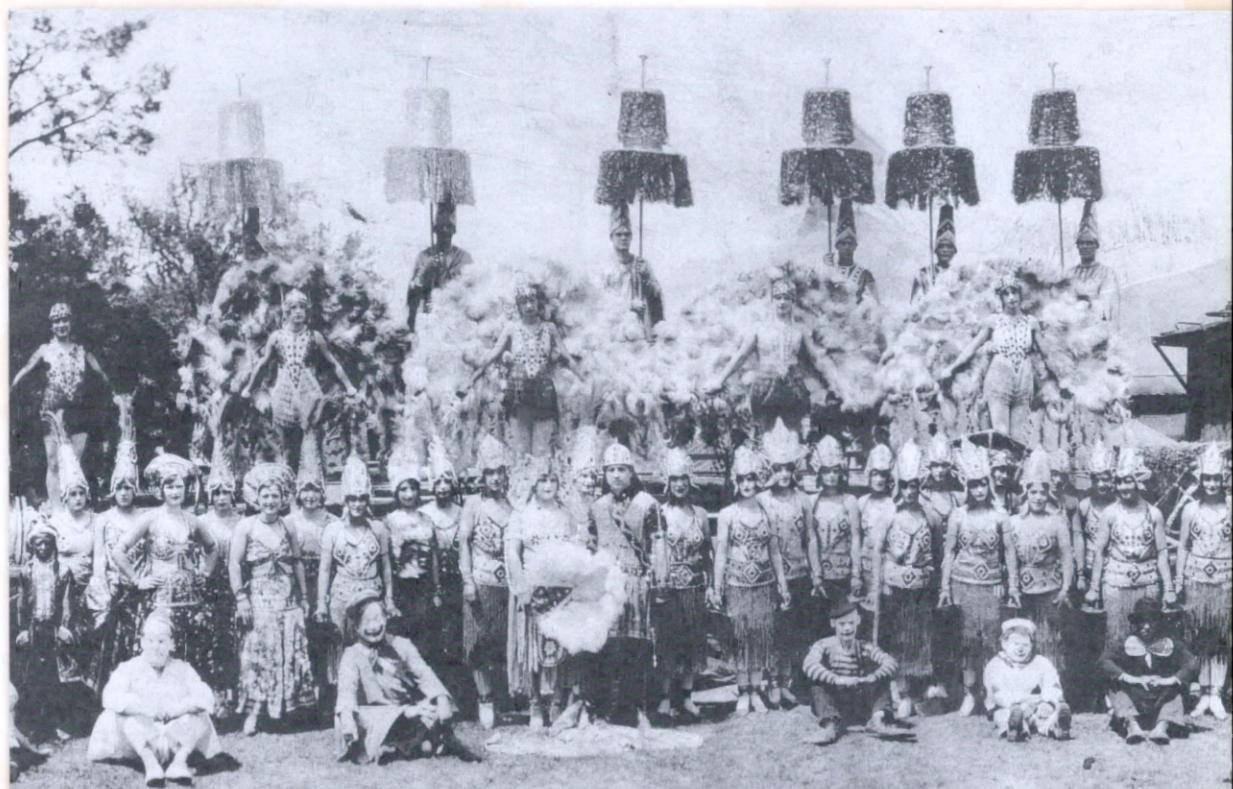
It was the combination of cinematographic casting, Oriental



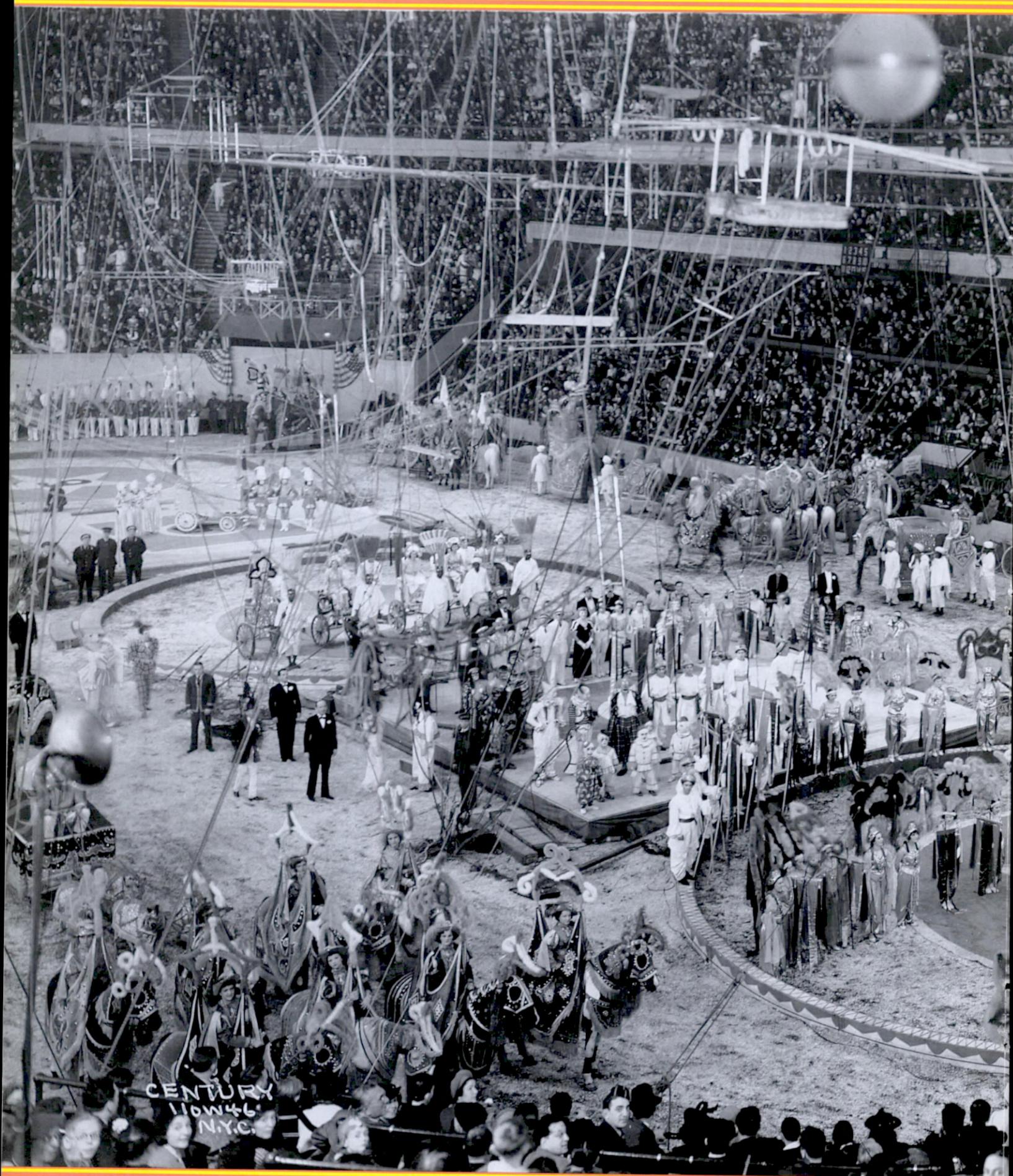
opulence, and Art Deco styling that made the De Rosselli specs so noteworthy. Comparing the wardrobe used by the Hagenbeck-Wallace performers in the 1925 spec *Arabia* to that used in 1931 for De Rosselli's production *Golden Orient*, it is easy to see how the minimal lines and freely moving shapes of the Deco fashions had been fully adopted into the costumes. The stiff fabrics and bulky shapes of the earlier costumes gave way to the cut away bodices and swinging fringe skirts that highlighted the performers' bodies. Were it not for the circus lot setting, it would be almost impossible to differentiate these women from Ziegfeld's girls. The influence of cinematography may best be seen in the accessories, particularly the headgear.

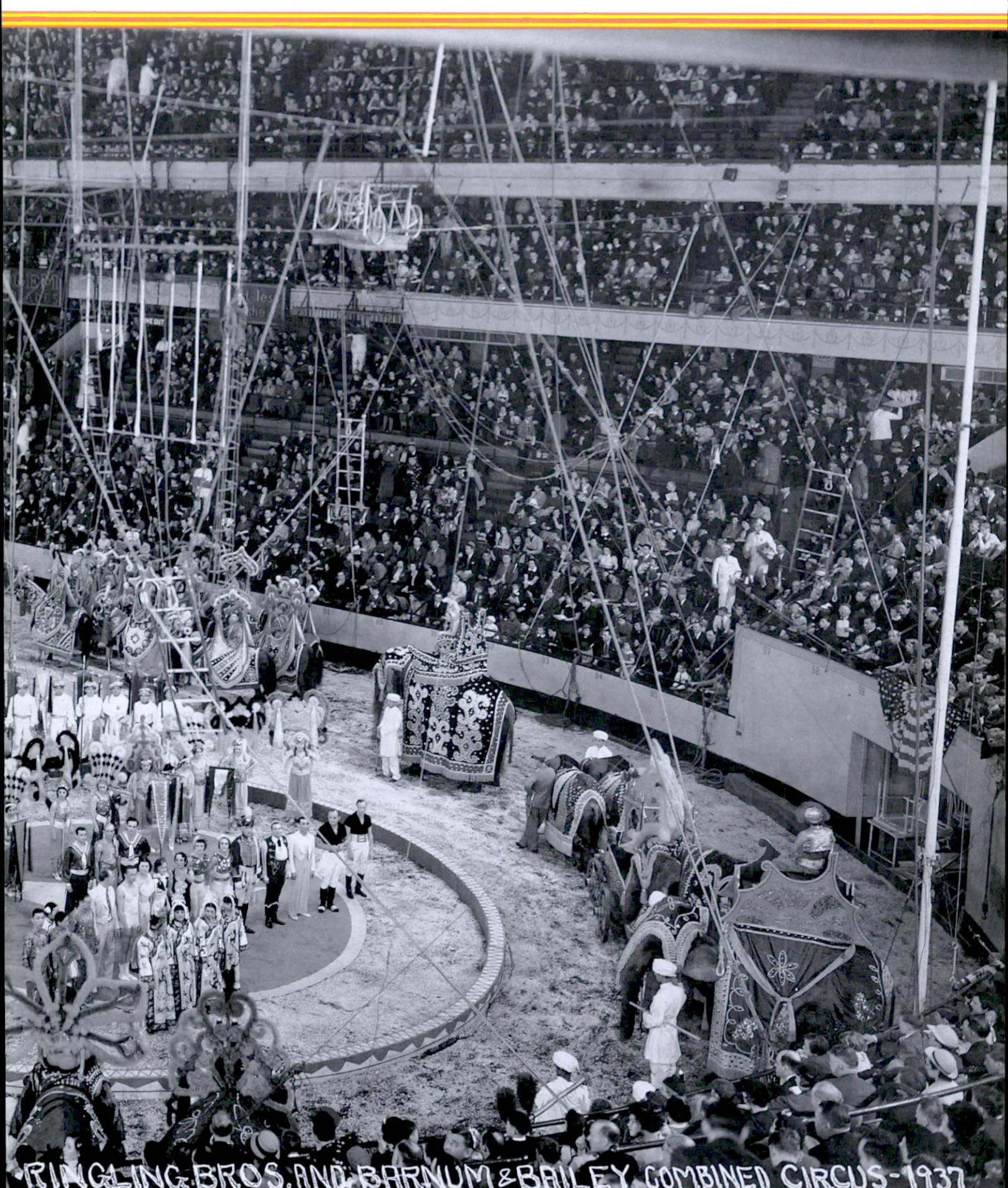
While the earlier production employed dramatic headdresses, the 1931 pieces warranted attention for the shimmering detail rather than their sheer size. The rich detailing can be seen in every aspect of costuming for De Rosselli's productions from the ornamented

In this E. J. Kelty photo Modoc, at left, leads the Durbar of Delhi spec in Madison Square Garden in 1933.
John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.



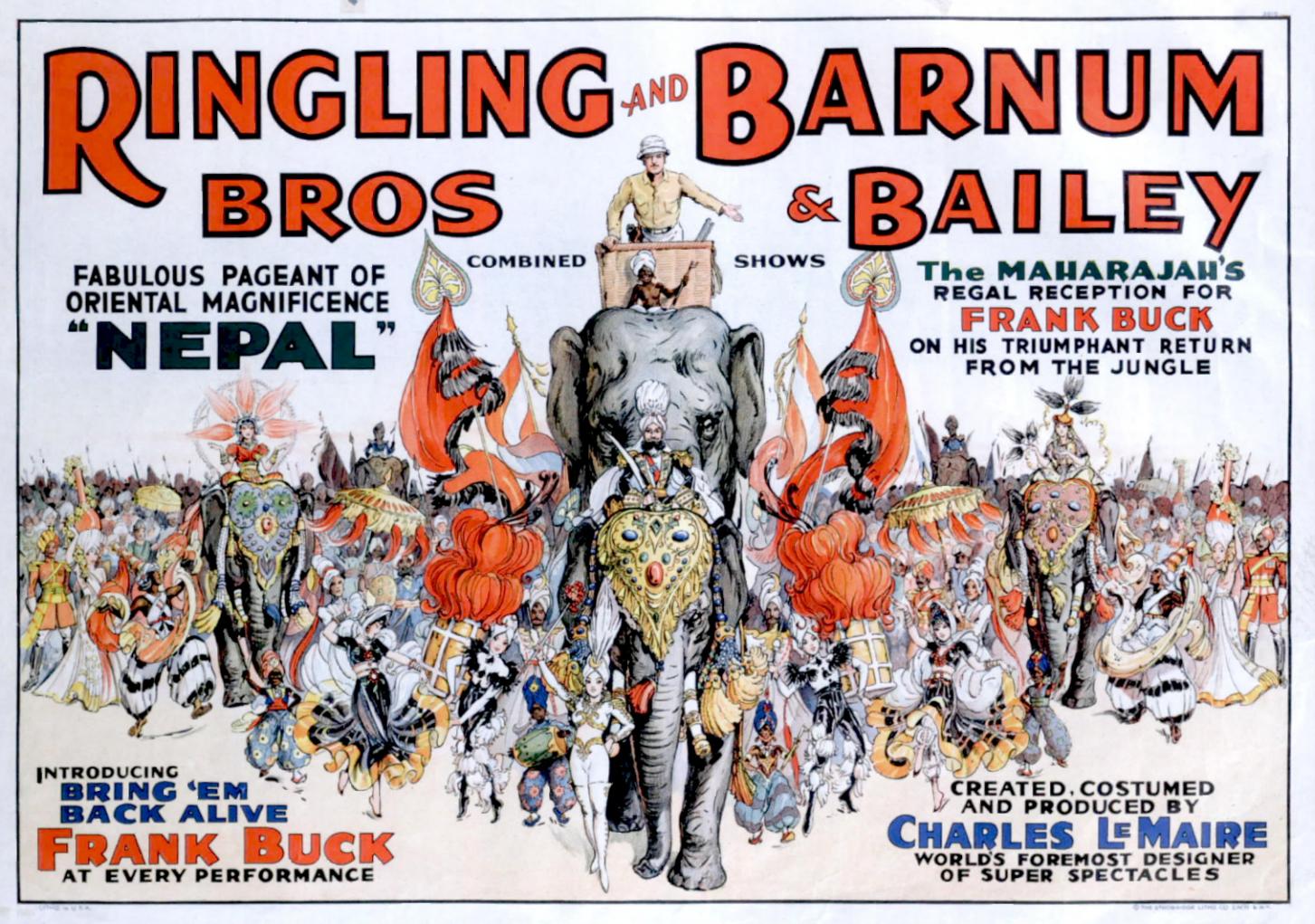
De Rosselli's work in Asia may have contributed to his exotic interpretation of Cleopatra as shown in this detail from a panoramic picture on the John Robinson Circus in 1930. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.





RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS - 1937

Scattered throughout the procession on the heads of elephants and in walking groups, showgirls supporting enormous armatures punctuated the 1937 spec in this E. J. Kelty photograph. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.



Charles LeMaire's original sketches were copied for this 1938 Strobridge poster. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

headdresses and the metallic cording and sequins that adorned the bodice to the fringed skirt and the anklets that complete the girls' costumes. Theatrical productions, and circus, had largely depended on size to allow patrons to observe details from any distance, while movies offered the ability to close in on smaller details, so wardrobe styling often became more intricate.

A panorama of the 1930 *Cleopatra* spec that De Rosseli directed for the John Robinson Circus exemplifies how the actor turned director utilized theatrical and cinematic standards and above all, favored the allure of the decorative showgirls, in revisiting a tried and true spec subject. The story of the Egyptian queen had been popular with showmen since at least the days of Adam Forepaugh, whose Cleopatra's Barge was a fixture in parades and processions for over twenty years. Throughout the 1920s Egyptomania experienced a resurgence fueled by the 1922 exploration of the tomb of Tutankhamen. The clean, geometric designs that characterized ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs were adapted into some of the most popular Art Deco designs. De Rosseli presented the story through thematic units and the costuming clearly delineates groups, with dancers divided into specific groups by garb. Like other productions of the day, De Rosseli's *Cleopatra* did not attempt to narrate a detailed story, a task better left to the movies, instead favoring a tribute to the splendor of the ancient world as a means of establishing the circus an exotic, varied, and rich production. This serialized presentation combined with the Follies-styled costuming

of loose skirts and cut away tops would have created a very modern experience of the ancient story. The distinctive wardrobe divides the production performers, with the men wearing one of three discrete sets of wardrobe while the women wear one of the five different styles. The women are further differentiated by those wearing practical dancing attire, like the girls in the middle on the ground level in ribbon skirts meant to accentuate choreography, versus those costumed in the oversized creations that whimsically alluded to birds and other creatures. It is worth noting that even the elephants are costumed with a lavish eye to ornamental design. In staging the cast photograph for the spec, a directorial eye conceived of how to best arrange the varied heights and textures of wardrobe and props. Like the performance, the main characters are secondary to the sheer visual opulence of the production.

Compared to the variety and often exotic flavor of the spec costuming in the late 1920s, with the 1933 Golden Jubilee season, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey presented *The Durbar of Delhi*, a more tightly themed introductory procession likely inspired by the Durbar, or coronation ceremony, held in Calcutta in 1932. Although not accurate in location, the spec title was catchy and would have resonated with circus fans who might have remembered the 1905 Barnum and Bailey spec staged by Bolossy Kiralfy. The modern Durbar production put great emphasis on the elephants, with the elephant Modoc, painted gold, as the outstanding feature of the procession. Showgirls in heavily patterned dresses were carried

around the hippodrome track in elaborately decorated howdahs, again playing up the role of the elephants in the show. *The Durbar of Dehli* was a nostalgic production, the first produced under the management of Samuel Gumpertz, looking back at what the circus specs had been in the decades prior instead of looking out at what was happening in other entertainments. The patterned fabrics were used to create wardrobe that was heavy and layered in comparison to the styles utilized by De Rosselli. No fewer than two dozen individually designed and ornamented elephant blankets added to the sumptuous weight of the production.

While the numerous elephant blankets, howdahs and glamorous costumes seem extravagant for any Depression-era show, Ringling management, like that of other circuses, made the initial out-lay of money, hoping the rejuvenated spec would boost attendance, and knowing that it represented an investment that could be used for several seasons. This production was reworked annually through the 1937 season, Gumpertz's final as manager. During those years, new props and costumes once again began to allude to the clean sleek lines of the modern aesthetics like the Deco movement, although the heavy use of jewels and other adornments was significantly diminished. By 1934 many of the showgirls were presented as grand ornaments sprinkled throughout the spec.

Whether dressed in clean, light colored bodysuits and seated on the back of an elephant or clothed in glittering gold pants with sequined bodice tops, these girls supported enormous garland style armatures shaped in swirling Deco motifs. In their simplicity, these elements, referred to as headdresses, although the weight was generally carried on the shoulders, were both elegant and exotic, turning the girls into ornaments for the production. Despite the lavish accessorizing of the spec wardrobe of the late 1930s, performers' costumes of the time were sleeker than ever as aerialists such as the Flying Concellos wore tight fitting, light-colored body suits with just enough rhinestone adornment to sparkle and equestriennes like the Reiffenach sisters wore similarly simple body suits with light skirts or poufs to allude to the full skirts of former years.

The most significant twentieth century intersection of the American circus with the styles and trends of other mainstays of popular culture came when John Ringling North took over management of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1938. As Henry Ringling North recalls in *The Circus Kings*, the Norths "developed a philosophy of circus showmanship to fit the new age in which we were living."¹³ This philosophy was based on a belief that contemporary audiences had grown in sophistication because of access to theater and cinema and therefore aspects of presentation such as costume designs, lighting and music needed to be updated. The North management came at a time when the entertainment industries had begun to recognize the contributions that the designers of costumes, lighting and scenic elements made to the overall success of a production. Beginning with the New York actor's strike of 1918, theater producers were required to provide wardrobe to the actors in any production, leading to a growing influence of individual designers. North remarked that they chose Charles LeMaire, a designer for *The Ziegfeld Follies* and *George White's Scandals*, as well as one time head of the Brooks Costume Company, to "give [the show] unity and glamour."¹⁴ LeMaire was the first significant behind the scenes non-circus talent utilized to envision any type of Ringling production since John Rettig worked with the brothers on the 1904 spec *Jerusalem and the Crusades*.¹⁵ Without a doubt LeMaire's background with the revues secured his role with the circus. Glamour was the key element that the



Seated on the elephants' heads, these 1936 or 1937 Ringling-Barnum showgirls became ornamentation for the entire spec procession. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

Norths desired, and the entire show was designed with an exotic, Orientalist look. The management of the show even provided the performers with wardrobe for both production numbers and individual acts, thereby assuring the visual unity of the entire presentation.

LeMaire's costumes for the Nepal spec may have shown an Oriental influence, but in truth they were inspired by the girls of the theatrical revues. The production was a procession that was organized in distinct sections with groups of dancing girls



The Reiffenach Sisters, here with clown Felix Adler about 1930, whose carrying act was a popular attraction in the 1930s, often wore close fitting leotards. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.



LeMaire's style, emphasizing the girls' busts and long legs, would have been at home in any of the era's revues. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.

interspersed between units of elephants and other exotic animals. The dancers were costumed in long, flowing skirts with midriff baring tops. Feathers and jeweled turbans were mixed with headdresses that depicted water jugs and flower baskets. The climax of the entire procession was the entry of Frank Buck, "the apotheosis of the white hunter and about the last of the truly glamourous [sic] adventurer types," and, most significantly, star of the silver screen. In this first production for the North brothers, they immediately acknowledged and embraced the powerful cultural influence of both movies and theatrical revues. The theatrical influence was increased for the 1939 season when North, citing the need for dramatic contrast to frame LeMaire's designs as a prime motivation, chose to travel the Big One under a blue top.¹⁶ After the labor disputes of the previous season, North banked on streamlining the show, changing the size of the big top and "junking . . . the traditional Oriental opening parade" in favor of a spec that was "eminently contemporaneous, 'The World Comes to the World's Fair."¹⁷ In truth there was no significant change in the spec format, just a new set of wardrobe, designed by LeMaire, reflecting a global array of cultures rather than the focusing only on India and Asia as most of the other productions of the decade had done. North's goal was to make the circus relevant to its age and sustainable in terms of the critical resources of finances and talents.¹⁸

Prior to the beginning of the 1940 season, North travelled to Europe, booking new acts and finding a designer whose experience in costuming such recognized productions as those of the Folies Bergère and Ziegfeld made him a logical replacement for LeMaire. The choice of Max Weldy perhaps had more to do with his skills at operating an atelier to fabricate elaborate performance wardrobe than it did on his own personal design abilities. The costumier had been

a critical figure in the development of the wardrobe for the Paris music halls of the 1910s through the 1930s. In that time, costume makers were more esteemed in the Paris scene than designers. In that position, Weldy had the ability to select from a pool of some of the most talented young designers of the age including Erté, Dolly Tree and Georges Barbier.¹⁹ In his work with such talented designers, Weldy developed the mutually beneficial practice of contracting with multiple venues for certain productions. In this way, costumes designed by Erté would be used by the Folies Bergère at the same time that the styles were seen in *George Whites Scandals*. Such arrangements sky-rocketed the careers of Erté and the others, placing their names in programs

throughout Europe and America.²⁰ As few artists are more closely tied to a contemporary understanding of Art Deco aesthetics than Erté, it seems fitting that John Ringling North would jump at the opportunity to bring the artist's longtime mentor into the Ringling stable of innovators.

Max Weldy's designs for the 1940 opening spec *The Return of Marco Polo*, may have been inspired by his longtime association with the Parisian designers of the Deco age, but with costumes that were made in flat colors with relatively little of the sequins, jewels and crystals that had sparkled on earlier production wardrobe, the spec did not evoke the glamour of those of previous seasons.



*The massive howdahs and other props for *The Return of Marco Polo* in 1940 were the last gasp of the traditional circus spec as the Ringling brothers knew it. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Collection.*

The shapes of the garments relied on basic geometric forms; male performers were clothed in billowing harem pants, or formal military jackets while the women wore costumes with bikini tops, cut-aways or diaphanous panels intended to add to their exotic, seductive character. Feathered turbans, fez caps, crowns and other headdresses were the primary accessories with a relative lack of the glittering spangles, sequins and jewels that had characterized costumes of the early Deco period. Divided into sections based on the different lands visited by the famous explorer, only one season after disavowing the "Oriental style spec," the Ringling show once again embraced the circus' relationship with all things exotic and unknown, and embraced their appeal. Weldy, such a powerhouse of Deco fashion at its zenith, was still a creature of habit, designing a show that fit with the aesthetic of a decade earlier, but failed to embrace the whimsical possibilities presented when dressing the circus. Ultimately he would become a critical behind the scenes player in producing the show—bringing to life the imaginative and magical visions of Miles White and a variety of other designers over most of the following three decades.



By the early 1940s the clean silhouettes of Modernism had made revealing skin more commonplace and performers such as Dorothy Herbert often wore skimpy costumes. Sverre O. Braathen photograph, Cole Bros. Circus, July 23, 1941, Springfield, Illinois, used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library.

Just as the decadent trappings of the Deco showgirls were phasing out of the spec displays, the stars of the circus were also adjusting their wardrobe to fit contemporary trends. The long, tubular styles that had dominated the 1920s and early 1930s gave way to a new style of tailored fashion. Shoulders and hips were once again emphasized in order to de-emphasize waists. Fabrics tended to be stiffer and stronger to support such tailoring, and skirts and tops shrunk, showing more leg and, in swimsuits and performing costumes, revealing midriffs more than ever before.

The vivacious Dorothy Herbert, with costumes of short trunks and abbreviated tanks, exemplified the clean, less adorned styles that would become popular during the war years.

What played out in the changing circus fashions of the Art Deco era was a cultural revolution in entertainment institutions and fashions that was taking place on multiple fronts. Most obviously, circuses found ways to integrate the spectacle of other live entertainments, glorifying the showgirl as a central element of productions and creating specs that were composed of discrete units that together alluded to the overall theme. Simultaneously, with producers like Rex De Rosseli and designers like Charles LeMaire, American circuses embraced the modern era of production design, recognizing the power of cohesive design to improve the audience's experience of an entire performance. The sleek silhouettes and flashy rhinestones were the visible signs of the rejuvenation of the classic American entertainment, and were the gateway to the incredible productions that brought a renewed energy to the circus in the 1940s and 1950s. **BW**

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Endnotes

1. Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 214.
2. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 215.
3. "The Big One Opens in the New Garden," *Billboard*, April 10, 1926, 11.
4. "The Big One Opens in the New Garden," 11.
5. Weldy would bring some of his talented prodigies, including Erté and Jose de Zamora, to design for the Ringling show in the late 1950s.
6. "Circus Opens Today 'Better Than Ever,'" *New York Times*, March 31, 1921, 21
7. *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Magazine and Daily Review* (Chicago, IL: F.J. Riley Printing Company, 1926) n.p.
8. "The Big One Opens in the New Garden," 11.
9. "The Big One Opens in the New Garden," 11.
10. "The Big One Opens in the New Garden," 11.
11. "Rex de Roselli famous actor and wild animal trainer 'A Jungle Hero,'" *Salt Lake Telegram*, November 30, 1916, 13.
12. "Rex Roselli," *The White Tops*, August-September 1941, 22.
13. Henry Ringling North and Alden Hatch, *The Circus Kings: Our Ringling Family Story* (New York: Double Day and Company, 1960) 256-7.
14. North, 258.
15. The Barnum & Bailey show used Bolossy Kiralfy to produce specs in 1906 and 1907.
16. North, 290.
17. Gladwin Hill, "Running Circus is a Cinch—If You Have \$12,000 Day," *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, April 4, 1939, 10.
18. David Hammarstrom, *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 70.
19. <http://www.garychapman.biz/Gary_Chapman/DT_Paris.html>
20. Erté, *Things I Remember: An Autobiography*, (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1970) 43. The artist describes his business relationship with Weldy as "long and fruitful."

CIRCUS SWINDLERS and

FOLLOWERS of the "Big Top" Are Still Making Money---Come Easy and Go Easy---from Country Sports.

The following article appeared in the Magazine Section of the April 17, 1910 New York Herald, and was reprinted in numerous newspapers afterward.

By Fred C. Kelly

A three ring, beclowned, menagerie circus was showing in a Pennsylvania town. Early in the afternoon a man wearing a ready-made four-in-hand and corduroy breeches rushed to the chief of police.

"That feller over on the show grounds skinned me out of \$90 jest now," he panted. "I want him run in! Come right along with me and I'll show him to you."

But somehow the chief wasn't enthusiastic over the chance to win fame by the capture of a smooth circus crook.

"How'd you lose your money?" he inquired. "What! Playing that shell game, eh? Then you were gambling, too? Uh, huh! Then if I do my duty I'll be obliged to lock you up. Didn't you know that gambling was prohibited by city ordinance?"

With a wise stare straight into the eyes of the man from the country the chief went on, "Tell you what you'd better do. I don't want to lock you up—though, of course, I'm supposed to lock up anybody guilty of gambling. Now, the thing for you to do is to skin

Drawing used in article to depict the shell game on the circus grounds.



along home. I'll walk over to the grounds and see what I can do. What sort of a looking feller was he? Yes. Well, you hustle on home now, and if there's any roundup or any trouble you'll be in the clear."

The chief of police, you observe, had been effectually "fixed."

City authorities who have spurned corruption by political rings, public contractors, the liquor interests, or others who would "use" them, have "fallen" for the plans laid by the circus "fixer." They see no objection to a few "harmless little games of chance." Perhaps it is the picturesqueness of the circus. Maybe they think it wouldn't be a circus day in town without three card monte.

In the larger cities, as a general rule, no effort is made to "work" or "fix." In the first place there are fewer country people in the circus crowds—and it is these that the fakers count on to take their bait. And then it is not considered practicable to "fix" the authorities in a large city. The officials may be corrupt enough, but they get their graft in a more refined manner than that employed by the circus "fixer" in "getting" officials. The circus grafter's paradise is one of these isolated towns of about ten thousands souls, or even less, which draws the simple country folk from miles around on circus day. In such cases the circus' revenue from illegitimate sources has been as high as \$5000 for the day—even aside from the "short change" graft.

Company of Fakers

The fakers with a big "graft" circus usually number not less than 30. Even in the old days of the wagon shows, with the entire circus troupe comprising not more than 80, there were a dozen or more fakers with private vehicles of their own. But those were the primitive days of the circus—and of fakers as well.

First there is the grafter in chief, a sort of managing faker, who employs his staff, acts as banker, deals with the circus manager, directs his men and keeps a general oversight to see that something doesn't "slip up." He doesn't do any work. The "fixer" is, of course, a part of the graft system, but he is usually employed by the circus itself. He arranges with the police or sheriff for no interference. The chief grafter makes the deal with the circus manager at the beginning of the season. This deal provides that the circus proprietor gets half of the gross receipts of graft on the grounds. That provision is invariable. The circus man must always have half. The head grafter gets something less than one-fourth of the total income of the day, for a fourth goes to the individual fakers—the shell men, the three card men, and the others. And then out of his own portion he must hire the "cappers" and two or three "sleuths." Each faker, out of his own profits—and this is true of the whole graft department—is required to pay his board, usually about \$10 a week and \$5 for a bunk. In the old days, when the shows used to travel entirely by wagon and the grafters had to provide their own vehicles, they were charged up with the feed of their horses.

The "cappers" and "sleuths" are paid a straight salary, which runs usually from \$20 to \$25 a week, according to their efficiency. In fact, the faker's chance of being hired

THEIR GAMES

at all depends upon his ability. One of the exactions of the circus proprietor when he makes his deal with the master faker is that the latter employs "good" men—that is, men who will not "overlook any bets." While he is at it the circus man wants to get the biggest rakeoff possible. But once the chief has all the fakers that he thinks necessary no more can operate on the grounds about that circus. "Buttinskis" are absolutely not tolerated. It is the duty of the "sleuths" employed by the graft department to report any such, and it is an unhappy day for the latter when the other fakers catch him.

And, be it said to the credit of circuses, all pickpockets are consistently fought. Owing to the obvious necessity for secrecy in their work the pickpockets are not so easily detected by the circus authorities as superfluous gambling fakers, but they are kept off as far as possible. They come around and work just as they do at county fairs and various places where they may find great crowds, but it is not believed that any pickpocket has worked with the sanction of the circus—at least, not in recent years.

Entirely distinct from the gambling graft is the "short change" graft. The man who works this does not pay tribute to the chief of the gambling fakers, nor is he in any way connected with that department except by common interest. He makes his own deal with the circus proprietor and the two divide evenly. The rule that the proprietor must have his half always stands.

There is seldom any short change work, either, by the man who sells tickets at the sideshow. It isn't that he's so honest. The circus thinks it wouldn't pay. At best his graft revenue would be comparatively small and he would put thousands of otherwise unsuspecting dupes on their guard against further swindles. A man might not make much of a "squeal" about being "short changed" out of 10 or 15 cents on his way into a sideshow, but he would keep his hands on his pocketbook when he got inside. And it is in the sideshow tent that the great bulk of the games are worked.

The principal fake gambling games worked on circus grounds are the "three shell," the "three card game"—that is, three card monte—roulette, the "beehive," "Klondike," the "tobacco box," the "strap trick," the "send joint," the "fish game," the "eight dice," the "envelope game" and the "dial."

The striking characteristic of all the games is that one can win with just the same facility that a millionaire can ride a low browed, double humped camel through the eye of a No. 60 needle. But it must be borne in mind that these devious games have never been permitted by the Ringling Brothers, owners of the Barnum and Bailey show.

Nearly everybody knows that the working outfit of a three shell man consists of three English walnut shells and an elusive little cork or rubber ball the size of a pea. The object of this game is for the "guy," as the victim is called, to guess which shell the ball is under. The faker shows the ball under one shell and then moves the shells briskly, one at a time, back and forth across the board. The "guy" is lucky if the ball is under any of the shells when he makes his guess. For in this game one can win only as often as the man behind the shells sees fit. The people who have not won on this game could make the standing army of Japan look the size of a police squad in Bucyrus. It is a game, too, in which the "capper" is an essential cog. The "capper" drifts up and wins and then the rest of the crowd begins to elevate its eyebrows and finger its ready money.

The man slides the little shells over the board and carelessly leaves the ball peeking out from under the edge of one shell. A stranger who had won money himself only a moment before whispers hoarsely in the ear of the victim: "See it. Don't you see it there? Bet him!"

After the victim or victims have put up their money the man gives the shells an additional move or two, which gives him a chance to pick up the ball between two fingers. Except for this fact many might win.

"See," he says, picking up a shell, "you guessed wrong." Then lifting another one and dropping the ball from his fingers, "it was under this one all the time."

The crowd looks around for the "capper," who gave the "bum steer," but he is gone.

A Pennsylvania Dutchman is mentioned as the cleverest shell worker that ever lived. He had short, fat legs and he could form the table he needed for his shells by throwing his leg over the handle of a heavy cane he carried.

One old circus man tells of the day this man took \$100 away from a smug looking preacher. The minister fell over in a faint and fairly began to froth at the mouth. "You've killed him," remarked this circus man, who happened along just then. Whereupon the shell man took the money and shoved it into the man's hand. "I was just foolin' you," he said, and the minister began to revive.

"The next time I get any of his money he can just croak and stay croaked," grunted the grafter disgustedly when he saw how easily the man was restored to life.

But of all the unconscionable crooks that ever stepped on a show ground by far the smoothest as well as the orneriest and meanest, say the old timers, was "Canada Bill," whose game was three card monte. He dressed shabbily and posed as a "greenie" trying to imitate the real fakers. His makeup was so clever and he possessed such skill at acting his role that the crowd could not conceive of the possibility that he was "slick" enough to get any of their money. He would get hold of a small piece of pine board and then sneak off to a fence corner or other out of the way place and begin to throw his cards. A crowd would soon gather. "I seen some o' them fellers throwin' these things," he would remark with an ingenuous grin. "I b'lieve I c'n do it as well as they kin, soon's I practice a bit."

A "capper" would come along and win some money and then the crowd would stampede up to try

to do the same thing, even though it seemed like a shame to take money from such a novice. But Bill would win. "Got you that time!" he would cackle. "I guess I'm gettin' pretty good."

One day a big chap lost \$20. Before the monte man could pick up the winnings the stranger grabbed up the pile of bills and broke away through the crowd.

"Let him go," laughed the monte man in a hurt tone. "He ain't honest, that feller ain't. I beat him fair and square."

He had his reason for not chasing the man. "I could win twice as much while I'd be chasin' him," he would explain to the circus man.



Photograph of Canada Bill Jones, the legendary three-card monte tosser.



Canada Bill, dressed for work, imitating a rustic.

Incidentally, Canada Bill was as much of a sucker as any of his victims. He made his headquarters in Omaha, where he was fleeced by other sharpers out of all his stealings.

Fully equal in importance to the man who actually works any of the gambling swindles is the "capper." The "capper," whatever game he may work at, always is dressed like a "rube"—not with pink chin whiskers, blue overall and figurative clover in his eyebrows, like the grotesque countryman who is part of the circus parade, with a hayfork over his shoulder—that makeup would be too obvious.

The "capper" watches his chance to get alongside of some man from the uncut who's sizing up the alluring banners in front of the sideshow. If the "capper" can make the acquaintance of the "guy" on the outside their intimacy will be all the further advanced by the time they have seen the tattooed man—he of the pictorial clavicle and scapula—the sword swallower and strong man, and finally the games themselves.

Work of the "Capper"

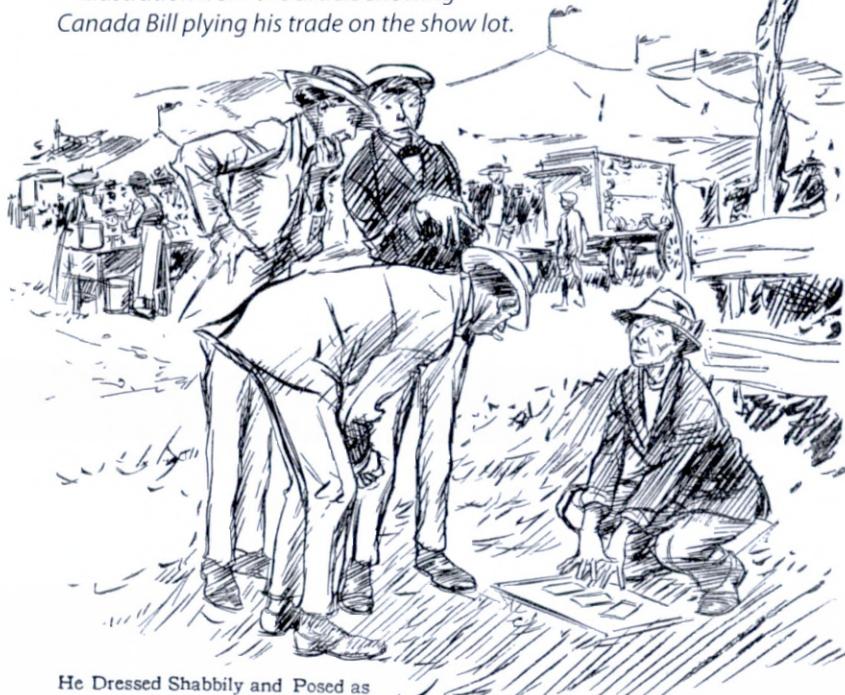
"Been in yit?" the "capper" asks the stranger at his side, as the two stare up at the wonders on the banner.

"No, not yet," the farmer replies. You?"

"Nope," says the "capper." "I sort o' hated to go in by myself. Tell you what I'll do, I'll buy tickets for both of us if you'll go in with me."

That looks good to the average "mark." He readily takes advantage of the ingenuous young man's liberality.

Illustration from the article showing Canada Bill plying his trade on the show lot.



He Dressed Shabbily and Posed as a "Greenie" Trying to Imitate the Real Fakirs

The "capper" doesn't take much interest in the game at first. But finally he whispers to his companion that he has a notion to have a try. He decides to wager a dollar at any rate. If he loses he will still have enough money to see the show, and if he wins he'll have made a killing.

And, would you believe it, the "capper" wins!

The guy wishes he had taken a chance. He makes up his mind that he who never takes a chance never stands to win anything. The two drift on to something else. Maybe they stop at a three card game. The success of this game from the faker's point of view is in the fact that the movements of the faker's hands in throwing the three cards are too rapid for an accurate kinetoscopic impression to be made on the retina; in other words, the hand is quicker than the eye, which is often just as true as it is trite. But the "capper" notices that one of the three cards has one corner turned up slightly. He whispers to the "guy" that he has a little scheme. He put up \$10 or so and wins. He winks at his companion and tells him it is a sure thing. "Watch the one with the corner turned up. He ain't noticed it," he says. The "guy" sees that his new found friend is right. All he has to do is to bet on the one with the corner turned up and it will be just like finding money. He bets all he has, perhaps, and loses, because, of course, the faker turns down that corner and turns up the corner of another one in the course of his manipulations.

Oh, but have you ever heard of the "send joint" game? Compared to this game, all other forms of gambling are no more risky than buying government bonds. It is at the "send joint" that the circuses get their big money. You'll say the game lacks the proper degree

of plausibility to catch the unwary. But don't fret. The "send joint" never yet has failed to earn a substantial dividend.

The game derives its name from the fact that it is a "joint" whence one is sent after more funds to turn over to the faker. It is in the form of a lottery. "Pull out a number just for luck," says the man operating the game. "You don't need to put up any money." The victim tried his luck, wagering, let us say, \$2000 of imaginary money. And he wins. Then the faker gives the victim to understand that he thought the play was in earnest. Yes, indeed, he thought it was all in deadly earnest. If the man had lost he would have expected him to put up \$2000, and now he has won the faker is willing to pay out \$4000 just as if the money had been regularly wagered—provided, however, that the agriculturist will put up his \$2000, just as a guarantee of good faith.

Magnanimous? Well, rather! This offer properly impresses the man from the fields of flowing grain with the faker's honesty—with the solid business methods on which he conducts his game of chance. But he hasn't any \$2000 with him. What a shame! Think of one losing \$2000 in cold cash just because he can't put up the margin! He might suggest to the faker that the latter give him the "order" for the \$4000, and then he could give back \$2000 out of that. But the "guy" is probably too excited over the prospect of so much wealth to think of that, and even if he did the faker would tell him he represented a big lottery company with headquarters elsewhere, and that it is against the rules to issue any orders unless the cash has been put up. In fact, he ought to have insisted upon having the cash in the first place, but then there is still a chance if the gentleman wants to put up his money.

Now, the "capper," before steering his "friend" up against the "send joint," had made inquiries and learned that he was a man who had money in the bank. That's part of the "capper's"

job. He calls the "guy" to one side. "I've got a little money with me," the "capper" says; "brought it in to buy a couple of horses while I was in town. I could let you have it if you get the rest of the \$2000. It's only \$200, but I'd like to have a chance to double it if I can."

The "guy" asks the faker if he will wait until he goes to the bank. The faker hesitates, but finally says he will. "But don't let them know at the bank what you want it for," cautions the faker. "Don't come directly toward the circus grounds after you get it, because you know how prejudiced some people are about any gambling game. Come by some roundabout way."

The victim starts to go to the bank. He is followed by one of the "sleuths." This is because the faker is always haunted by the fear that even "fixed" officials might turn "crooked," and that the man might go and complain to one of them instead of going to the bank. If the "sleuth" sees him go near any of the authorities he rushes back to the grounds and gives notice. Then by the time the intended victim gets back the "joint" has disappeared.

But when the man comes back with the money and turns it over to the faker, along with the sum put up by the ingenuous "capper," the faker suddenly discovers that he made a mistake in the winning number and that the man instead of winning has lost his money. "Don't know how I ever made such a mistake," the man says, "but you lost, after all."

When the "capper" learns that he has lost his \$200 he weeps like a child. A good "capper" can become lachrymose on short notice—shedding real tears, too.

The Tobacco Box Swindle

A swindle less pretentious but just as certain was the old "tobacco box" game. The "capper" with a "friend" in tow would observe a seedy looking man staking himself to a chew of tobacco out of a neat little wooden tobacco box. "Gimme a chew, friend?" the "capper" would ask.

"Help yourself if you can open that box," says the obliging stranger with a grin. "That's a trick box. Bechuh you can't open it."

But the "capper" seems to be clever at such things and he manages to open it.

The stranger seems surprised. "I didn't have it shut good," he says. "I'll bet you can't open it again." Whereupon the proprietor of the tobacco box places a \$20 bill under the lid. "Put up \$10, and if you can open it you can have the \$20," he says.

The "capper" and his friend hesitate, and the man tosses the box back into his pocket. "Aw, you fellows wouldn't bet you were alive, he sneers."

"Yes, I'll bet you," speaks up the "capper." Then, in a whisper to his companion: "I've got \$5. Let me have a fiver and we'll divvy up. I know how to open it." Or perhaps he explains to him just how he can open it.

At any rate, somehow neither one can open the box this time. There seems to be some secret lock that baffles detection. You see, when the faker put the box back in his pocket he switched boxes, and the box he hands out to the "capper" and his friend can be opened only with an ax. One day a man ran away with the box, intending to get out the twenty dollar bill at his leisure. Of course when he broke open the box all he found were a couple of splinters. For some reason or other the public has ceased to stand this game after a time. In Indiana a faker served time in the penitentiary for working the tobacco box trick—one of the comparatively few fakers ever sent up.

And There Are Others

Then there are roulette and the "beehive." The circus faker welcomes men who broke the bank at Monte Carlo, men with "systems" and all others at this roulette wheel. For he doesn't depend merely on the "percentage in favor of the house" for his winnings. By means of an invisible needle which he can raise in any one of the numbered receptacles he is able to prevent the little ball from rolling down on the number being played to win.

The same scheme is worked in the "beehive," an arrangement of wire shaped like a beehive. A little ball rolls down, bumping against nails in its path, until finally it alights over some number—which, however, owing to the faker's invisible needle, is the lucky number only when the "capper" is playing. If the "capper" were permitted to keep half of his winnings in the course of a good day he would not long be content to work at his job for \$20 a week.

The old fashioned dial with the numbers around the edge and a big pointer to spin has come to be an ingenious electrical and mechanical contrivance. The faker uses silver dollars for chips and stands nonchalantly by clinking a neat little smokestack of the negotiable silver disks on the table. And the table determines the number at which the pointer shall stop. All the faker has to do is to take note of the number of dollars in his pile and he can halt the pointer where he wills.

The envelope game is that in which one takes his choice of a row of sealed envelopes, some of which are reputed to contain negotiable green paper. Sometimes the faker places the money in the envelopes and sometimes one imagines that he can see the end of a bill protruding from the end of an envelope. But the disbursements to the players from this game have seldom reached more than the sum of a zero mark multiplied by a cipher.

In the fishing game one reaches for paper fish, some having lucky numbers hidden in their tails, the man says. But the sucker in this game always is caught at the pole end of the line. *BW*

Sketch from article of capper inducing a sucker to accompany him into the side show.



"Been in Yit?" the "Capper" Asks the Stranger at His Side

hat business. They know what is correct in head gear, and take pride in showing their knowledge."

It is a fact that there are more fine hats worn in Danbury than in any other town of its size in the country.

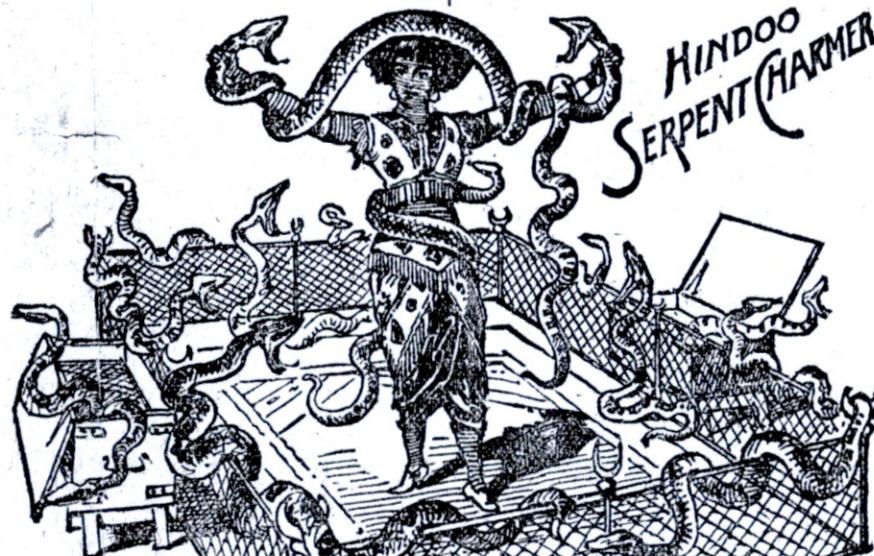
When the reporter had explained his object to Mr. Barnum's partner he was permitted join the circus for a limited season only. His name was not to appear on the bills and his duties were to be those of an observer and investigator. A carriage drawn by a fine spirited horse was placed at his disposal, a place in the "officers" mess was given to him, a berth in one of the circus Pullman cars was assigned to his use, and he had carte blanche to go whithersoever he wished in and about the big show at any and all hours.

The first thing he did was to go in and see how the circus as given in a small country town compared with the exhibition so familiar to New Yorkers in Madison Square Garden. He found it precisely the same in every detail. There were the same performers, the same acts, the same clowns, the same horses. Nothing was omitted, nothing curtailed. The knights and ladies rode just as gallantly before those wondering country gentlemen with the Danbury hats as they had ever done for the plaudits of their Gotham critics. The acrobats turned just as many somersaults, the big elephants went through their evolutions at the command of Mr. William Newman just as precisely. And there was one thing in the big tent which is never seen in the great building near Madison Square. In the rings, on the hippodrome track, under the seats, in the big menagerie tent, and, in fact, wherever the ground was visible at all, was fresh green grass. It was a great improvement over the tanbark of the city show. There were no electric lights, but their places were well supplied by gasoline lamps, which shed a brilliant and sufficient light upon the scene. The benches and patent folding seats were well filled, and the applause was generous.

In the Menagerie Tent

The reporter took in the show for a while, and then wandered out into the menagerie tent again. It was about 9 o'clock then, and all the people had gone into the big show tent. But there was plenty of life and activity in the menagerie tent. Gangs of men were moving

Newspaper ad for Barnum & Bailey 1889 opening stand in New York's Madison Square Garden featured the snake charmer. Pfening Archives.

| AMUSEMENTS. | AMUSEMENTS. |
|---|---|
| BARNUM & BAILEY'S | BARNUM & BAILEY'S |
| GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH. | 15 UNITED SHOWS. |
| MADISON SQUARE GARDEN. | MADISON SQUARE GARDEN. |
| <p>Last Week of the Monster Exhibition. Positively exhibiting at Putnam and Only Remaining Chances of seeing the Truly Remarkable Performances. Closing Performances of such a successful Visited by more People in three Crowded to the doors afternoons and even In very truth a continuous holiday season for During this last week no free tickets will be</p> | <p>Last week of the Grand Exhibition. Sumner aves., Brooklyn, next Monday. Final Opportunities of Witnessing the Grand Spectacles and Displays season as to be utterly without a parallel. weeks than ever before in its history. ings with the best people of the metropolis. the children and real school of instruction. issued to any one under any pretext whatever.</p> |
| THE VERY LAST WEEK. | |
| P. T. BARNUM AND | D. J. A. BAILEY'S |
| GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH. | |
| <p>Great London Circus, Sanger's Royal British New United Shows in One. 15 So great is the demand for seats, especially to the obtaining them unless secured in advance. Re night, which is Saturday, April 20. Thousands of bitions at all unless they attend the MATINEES. The Afternoon performances are precisely the same</p> | <p>ish Menageries, International Allied Shows. Complete Mammoth Exhibitions in One. NIGHT exhibitions, that there is no certainty of served seats and boxes may be secured up to the last persons will miss seeing these unparalleled exhibi- which, except Saturdays, are not overcrowded, as those of the evening.</p> |
|  | |
| <p>15 New, Complete, and Mammoth Exposi- Real Wild Moorish Caravan. Wizards' Hall of Supernatural Illusions. The only show that the present and future genera- useful information than any other institution. A pedia of valuable knowledge for all classes. Three elevated stages for Olympian Games and of the newest and most daring bareback horseman- ing, dashing, and rapid Hippodrome. The only really great show in Christendom. Novel sights, queer creatures, Talking Birds. Modern specialties, Marine Monsters, Living Giraffes, Prize contests, Strong Men, Trick Animals. The tiny dwarf hairy Elephant riding a bicycle. monkey performing remarkable tricks and exe- Thousands of odd curios, astounding and amaz- any</p> | <p>tions Combined in One Monster Show. 15 Genuine Arabian Fantasia. Double Menageries of Rare Wild Beasts. tions can attend with real delight. Affording more perfect Library of Natural History and Encyclo- Sports. Two Equestrian Rings for the Exhibition ship. Roman Racing Track for all the novel, thrill- Races and Wild Moorish Feats. The only Really Moral Circus on Earth. Barnum Wonders, Bailey Marvels, Foreign Features. Separate Races, Athletic Games, Aquatic Sports, Roman Contests, Arab Acrobats, Weird Scenes. playing musical instruments, and with a pony and cutting funny capers. A most wonderful sight. ing features of a pure moral character to delight one. Doors open an hour earlier for an inspection of all cents (4th avenue side). Children under nine years, 25 cents. Reserved seats, \$1. (Madison-av.) Private boxes, \$2. Single box seats, \$2.</p> |

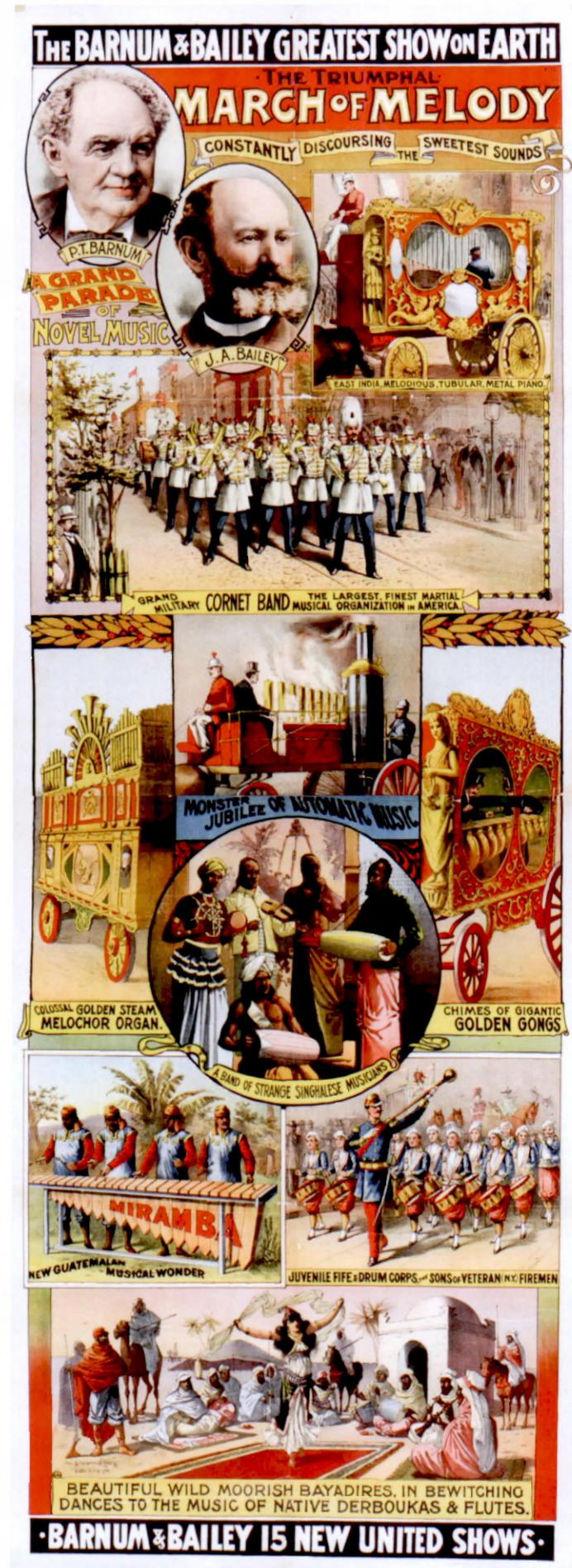
rapidly and silently from one place to another there. Some were putting up the red and gold sides to the wild animals' cages, others were pulling with the aid of long ropes the cages into position for the tour and six and eight horse teams to be hitched to them; others were unchaining the elephants and pulling up the great stakes to which they had been fastened; still others were getting the feed troughs together and arranging them neatly in a big red wagon. Pretty soon all these duties were accomplished. Then Mr. Newman requested that big elephant Gypsy to follow him. She did so and he led her from the tent, the rest of the herd following. They at once took up their march for the cars, a man going some distance ahead of them to warn the drivers of horses of their approach. This is a very necessary precaution, for if there is one thing above all others which will frighten your country horse into a convulsion it is the sight of a herd of elephants wandering dreamily along a village street after dark. Occasionally a horse takes fright, runs away, and does some injury. Then there is a lawsuit and damages to be paid. The Danbury horses kept out of the way that night, however, and the elephants reached their enormous box cars in safety and without incident.

After the elephants had left the tent and all the wagons had been placed in position with their poles pointing toward the centre, which work was done under the direction of Boss Hostler Tom Lynch, the former gave a signal, a section of the side of the tent was drawn aside, and the teams of great Normandy horses were driven in. Every driver knew just where to go and what to do, and in less time than one who is not up in the way of circus men would think possible the teams were hitched to the wagons and dens of wild animals, and the drivers were in their seats waiting for the signal to move off to the cars. The skill and celerity with which all this was accomplished reminded the reporter strongly of the work in a fire engine house when an alarm has struck. There was no confusion, no rushing to and fro, but everything was done silently, quietly, and in perfect system. As soon as all the horses were hitched to the wagons a man who stood at the open place where the horses had entered began to call out the numbers of the wagons. As he called each number the wagon bearing it would move quickly out of the tent and go lumbering off to the waiting cars.

The moment the last wagon had disappeared another man took charge of the now empty tent. This was Boss Canvasman Charlie McLean. He had about sixty men under him. They had taken their places all around the inside edge of the tent and were busying themselves with the ropes at the side poles.

"Let go," called out Mr. McLean, and instantly the sides of the tent fell to the ground, leaving nothing standing but the big canvas roof. Two minutes more and the canvas sides were rolled up into neat bundles and were being quickly jacked into a huge red wagon. It was raining slightly and Boss McLean, clad from head to foot in rubber garments, and carrying a lantern in his hands, was moving about from place to place among his men, hurrying them on, while his two assistants, Al Cole and James Riley, were getting ready to let down the roof. The quarter poles which stood midway between the sides and the centre poles were next taken down and carried away to their wagon. Then the side poles were removed, and finally when everybody had left the tent, some big ropes were loosened and in a moment the huge canvas had slipped down the centre poles to the ground. Instantly half a hundred men were swarming over the canvas, unlacing the sections of which it was made up. Others were untying the iron chains which had been used to still further steady the tent and hold it in position when it was up and

This two sheet Strobridge poster highlighted the musical features on Barnum and Bailey in 1889. Cincinnati Art Museum collection.



packing snugly into the wagons each and every part.

Quick Work at Night

The wagon packers had their part of the business down to a science. Each wagon was made to hold just so much and no more, and it required much skill to load them properly. Then every stake and chain and rope and piece of canvas was counted. If a stake was missing the wagon packer mentioned the fact, and it was hunted up. If a packer should neglect to call attention to a missing article he would be charged with it and the price thereof deducted from his pay. When he calls attention to it the blame falls upon the shoulders of one of the canvas men.

It didn't take many minutes for the men to unlace, roll up, and pack the canvas roof. Then the centre poles were let down and carried away, and in ten minutes from the time that the boss canvasman had given his first order to "let go" the place where the menagerie tent had stood was a vacant lot. The same performance was gone through with on the "illusion" tent, the "marquee," the

their every-day clothes, and the wardrobe men had packed away the trunks and tights and trappings. By midnight every bit of circus property had been taken from the grounds and everyone connected with the show had gone away.

Down at the cars was another busy scene. There Mr. Byron Rose, a veteran in the business, had charge of a big gang of men and was busy loading the show on the trains. It takes just fifty-four cars to move Barnum & Bailey's circus about the country, and there is not a car too many. Every car was built at the winter headquarters at Bridgeport and was especially designed for its particular work. The flat cars are all of a certain height and are made just long enough to accommodate the wagons for which they were designed. As each wagon leaves the circus grounds in a certain order so is it received at the cars and run on to the train. It is driven to the end of the long line of flat cars, the horses are unhitched, a block and tackle is fastened to it, a strong team of Normandy horses is hitched on and the wagon is rolled up an incline to a car. From this car it is wheeled the entire length of the train to its place, and before it has

reached it another wagon is on its way behind it on the cars. Each wagon is fastened firmly to the cars and when the section of the long train is loaded it is pulled away to make room for the next. The elephants are loading into big box cars, as are the camels and horses and other animals. Berths are fitted up in these cars for the accommodation of the animals' attendants.

While Mr. Rose is superintending the loading of the flat and box cars, the performers and others whose duties for the day are at an end are quietly going to bed in the regular sleepers. These sleepers are on the Pullman plan and are clean, comfortable, and roomy. Each one has its porter, who takes care of it during the day, makes up the berths, and at night blacks the shoes of



Letterhead used by Barnum and Bailey in 1889. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Howard Tibbals collection.

horse or stable tent, the side-show tent, the cooking tent, the dining-room tent, the blacksmith's tent and the dozen or so smaller tents where the toothsome peanut and "fresh, cool lemonade" had been on sale during the day. They were all taken down and carted away, and when the big assemblage came out of the main tent they found that all the rest of the circus had completely disappeared.

There was a concert after the main show, but even while it was going on workmen were silently taking down the flying trapeze, the tight ropes the rings and safety nets, and were carrying off one half of the seats. As soon as the last line of the last song was sung by the concert performers, the crowd was quickly moved out and the full force of canvasmen tackled the big tent. The main tent will accommodate 10,000 persons, and it is supported by four main poles and hundreds of smaller ones. But despite its great area it was taken down very quickly and packed into the waiting wagons, the horses for which had by this time returned from their first trip to the cars. Each team makes two trips every moving night.

In the dressing rooms the performers had made haste to get into

the occupants. He doesn't charge the price of a brick house for the service either, which is where he differs very materially from the ordinary porter. The occupants of the cars pay him a moderate sum weekly. It doesn't take very long for a circus performer to go to sleep after a hard day's work, and long before the train has pulled out for the next town everybody is in the land of Nod and dreaming, presumably of turning somersaults and riding bareback on nightmares there. That wasn't what the reporter dreamed on his first night in a circus sleeper. That would have been a very mild vision, indeed, in comparison to the one he had.

As well as he can remember now, he dreamed that a fancy spotted circus horse had him down in a corner and was reading to him the rules and regulations of the "Greatest Show on Earth," occasionally emphasizing the more important items by a vicious dig with his nose which filled the reporter with terror. That spotted horse took many, many hours to read those rules and the reporter rejoiced exceedingly when at daylight he awoke and the spotted circus horse went away about his business.

The Circus Code of Laws

In reality there is nothing visionary about those rules and regulations. They are hard, cold facts. A copy of them is posted up in every sleeper, and it behooves the person who joins the travelling show to get them down fine and live up to them, or he will make his farewell tour with a suddenness which may surprise him. Here are some of the rules:

Penalty \$25 fine or dismissal: No games, gambling, stealing, fighting, drunkenness, or any improper or unlawful conduct will be tolerated, no matter when, where, or under what circumstances committed, under penalty of a forfeiture of \$25 or immediate discharge or both, at option of the manager.

All performers are required to furnish their own "high top boots, crush opera hat, and gloves" of first-class material and make and of a uniform pattern to be approved by the management, leggings can not be substituted.

All performers are required to have the very best wardrobe throughout in quantity and quality, suitable to their special acts. This being the leading company of the world, all artists must dress accordingly, in the ring and on the streets, in a befitting manner.

It is customary to pay porters of sleeping cars a small fee weekly for blacking boots, personal attendance, &c. Use the trunk man for delivering hotel baggage to rooms.

All performers and other employees are required to make themselves generally useful unless especially specified otherwise in their contracts, holding objects, going in entrée, street processions, leaping, tumbling, assisting in other acts, after pieces, pantomime,

spectacles, marches, scenes, &c., as may be assigned them, without extra compensation.

No chairs or stools will be carried. Performers must sit on their trunks. No objection to camp stool being carried in dressing room trunks.

Penalty of \$1 to \$5 for swearing, quarreling, or loud, boisterous language about the establishment, cars, hotels, or other places. Good behavior required at all times.

Penalty \$5: All employees or other working men who board at



The Courier Lithograph Co. in Buffalo printed this colorful 16 page courier for Barnum and Bailey in 1889. Pfening Archives.

camp must conduct themselves in an orderly, quiet and gentlemanly manner, keeping clean, wash and comb before meals. None allowed to sit at the table without coat on.

Penalty of \$1 to \$5: All employees must arise every morning instantly on being called once only.

Penalty of \$1 to \$5: No employee or other member of the company will go to bed in the cars with their clothing or boots on, thus soiling or destroying the bedding.

Any performers who go in the ring are required to furnish kid



The show experienced a bad railroad accident in Potsdam, New York, during the run from Gouverneur, New York to Montreal on August 22-23, 1889. Thirty-one horses were killed when the stock cars telescoped into one another. Pfening Archives.

gloves, high top boots, and crush opera hats of a uniform style, approved by the manager, at their own expense.

Penalty full value: Any member or employee losing or destroying any property belonging to the company will be charged the full value thereof. No excuses will be received, whether the property is in their charge or not.

Penalty \$5: Every performer will remain in the dressing room, with his performing dress on until the performance is terminated, or so far advanced that he may be assured by the equestrian director personally that his services will not be required in case of accident to others during that performance.

Penalty \$10: No person not connected with the company will be admitted to the rear entrance under any circumstances. Any member, musician, or employee bringing strangers into the circus, show, or dressing room will forfeit \$10.

Penalty \$1 to \$5: No performer, musician, or employee will be allowed to pass in through the front door after doors are open to the public.

Penalty \$5 to \$10 or dismissal: No performer, musician, or employee will be allowed to associate with improper characters, neither will "mashing" be tolerated about the tents, streets, hotels, or any other public places.

Penalty of \$5 or \$10 or dismissal: No performer or member of

this company will be allowed to appear before an audience in a slovenly manner, or go into the ring with soiled or dirty tights, or wardrobe on. All persons must keep themselves neat and clean.

One day each week will be salary day. No money shall be paid any performers, musician, or other employee on any other day, no matter what the circumstances or how trifling the amount may be.

Penalty \$5: No performers or other employee will be allowed to have on the cars of this company any spirituous or malt liquors.

Penalty \$5: Loud or boisterous talking positively prohibited on the sleeping cars, and no one permitted to disturb or annoy those desiring to rest and sleep.

Penalty \$5: All employees of every kind are strictly enjoined from using alcohol, oil or other kind of cooking apparatus on any of the sleeping or other cars of this company, under the above penalty.

Penalty \$1 to \$5: Skylarking, boisterous talking or quarrelsome behavior is strictly prohibited. This rule is intended particularly for the dressing room, and will be strenuously enforced there and elsewhere.

There are many other rules besides those given here, and in addition to them the contracts which the performer must sign before going on the salary list contain many cast-iron conditions which must be lived up to to the letter. It might be a good idea to furnish the small boy of the land who has a yearning to go away and join the circus with a copy of these rules and a contract or two. Then he would probably change his mind and go out West to fight Indians instead.

The rules seem hard, but they are those which are suggested by experience, and without them it would be impossible to keep up the discipline which is necessary in handling over 600 people on the road. As it is, discharges are by no means infrequent, and sometimes twenty men are laid off at a time for the infringement of some important rule.

Here is an incident in the life of the circus man which is happily of rare occurrence, but which made things lively in the sleeping cars one morning last week. The company had been showing in Bridgeport and the sleepers were on the track close to the station platform. The night that the company left Bridgeport was a very warm one, so when the tired performers went to their berths they opened the windows for air. Then they went to sleep. While they slept some thief came along the platform and reaching in his hand took everything he could get hold of. The consequence was that the next morning many of the performers found themselves without coats or hats or trousers. A number of watches were also taken, besides a good deal of money. Last year a Pinkerton detective who was travelling with the show was robbed in a similar way of nearly everything he possessed, including a full suit of clothes and a hat.

Morning on the Circus Train

When the reporter awoke he was in Waterbury. The long-winding train had pulled into the town on the beautiful Naugatuck River before daylight to keep company with the long-winding Waterbury watches. It must be confessed, however, that the watches could give the train several laps to the good and beat it on the home stretch. The reporter man left the car and stepped out upon the platform. The sun had not yet risen, but the small boy of Waterbury had. The latter had been up all night and was on hand to see the first

locomotive come pulling behind it a long line of gaudily painted cars. And speaking of the car, it might be well to mention that particular care has been given to their construction, and to construction of the wagons which they carry, so as to have them of precisely the right height. None of them is more than 13 feet 6½ inches high when loaded. No railroad bridge or tunnel in the country is less than 13 feet, 8½ inches high. It will be seen, therefore, that there is always a space of at least two inches between the top of the car and under side of the bridges or the roofs of the tunnels. A close shave sometimes, but sufficient for safety. In going through the great Hoosac tunnel some weeks ago there was a close fit. The engineers of the Fitchburg Railroad measured the cars and said that they could not get through. They said that they were not only too high, but too wide as well. Mr. Bailey insisted that there would be an inch and a half to spare. The trains were allowed to go through the 4½ mile tunnel at reduced speed, and it was found that there was a space of 1½ inches between any part of them and the tunnel.

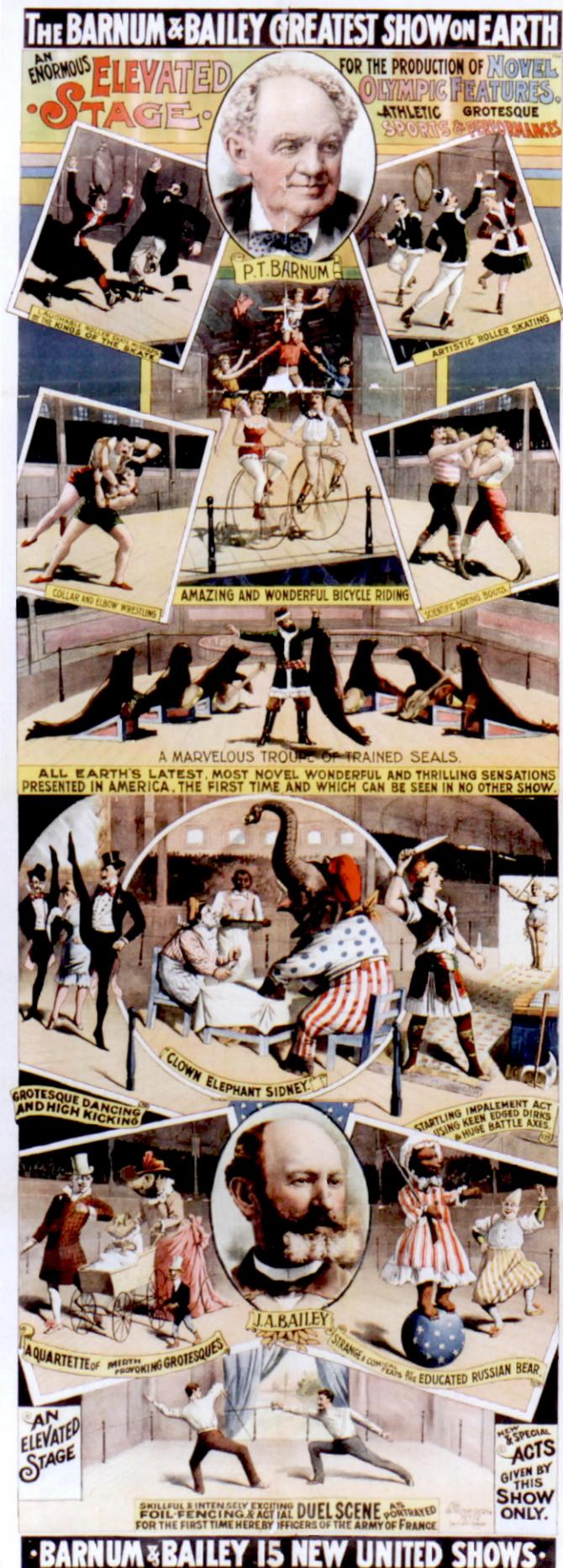
"We knew more about the tunnel than the railroad engineers themselves," said Mr. Bailey, on speaking of this to the reporter.

But the small boy of Waterbury was not so much interested in the size of the circus cars as their contents. He hung around in great numbers, and watched with eager interest the process of unloading, which was that of loading reversed. The last wagon to leave the circus the night before in Danbury was the first on the new ground in Waterbury. Everything was in proper order. There was no confusion, nothing out of place. The first man on the grounds was the boss canvasman, Mr. McLean. With a tape line and several assistants he soon had the places for the various tents marked out. He marked the place where each pole and stake was to go with little iron surveyor's pins ornamented with different colored rags. When the canvasman and stake gangs arrived they found their work all cut out for them. It was interesting to see the way in which the stakes were driven. One or two men went ahead and stuck the big stakes in their proper places. Following them came six men carrying sixteen-pound sledge hammers. The six men would gather in a circle about a stake four feet high. The leader would give it a gentle tap with his hammer; the next to his right would follow with a slightly harder tap; the next man to his right would follow suit, and in a moment the entire six would be bringing the weight of their sixteen-pound sledges down on the stake, one after the other, in quick succession. When each man had struck two or three blows the stake would be driven home, with only three or four inches sticking above the ground. It took only about twenty seconds to drive a stake. The men never missed a blow, and the precision with which they worked was well worth studying. There were half a dozen of these stake gangs at work on the grounds at the same time. While they were working for all they were worth, and while the canvasmen were unrolling the big bundles of canvas, arranging them in their proper places, lacing the pieces together, and hoisting the centre poles, the cook was busy preparing breakfast.

Getting the Meals

He and his assistants had started the fires in the ranges before the train had come to a stop. The ranges were in three wagons designed especially for the purpose. Mr. Henry Cohen, the steward, had gone ahead the day before and had contracted for the delivery of meat, eggs bread, and all the necessary provisions on the circus grounds at daylight. When the cook's wagons arrived, shortly after, the provisions were there waiting for them. Several camp fires in addition were

This Strobridge two sheet lithograph gave an overview of the various acts in the 1889 performance. Cincinnati Art Museum.



•BARNUM & BAILEY IS NEW UNITED SHOWS•

ITHACA, 1889

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13.

P. T. BARNUM'S
Greatest Show on Earth, The Great London Circus,
PARIS OLYMPIA HIPPODROME,
2 Menageries, 3 Circuses, Museums, Horse Fair,
AQUARIUM,

REAL WILD MOORISH CARAVAN and FANTASIA.

15 New United Shows in One. 15

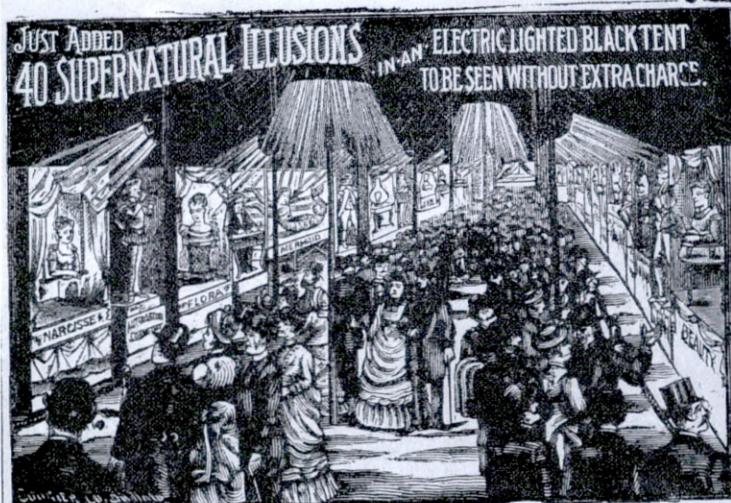
The Most Remarkable and Grandest of Earthly Displays.

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MUSEUMS. Teeming with living curiosities.
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 Sports, games, athletics, &c., on the **ELEVATED STAGES**.
 PARADE. The biggest and grandest of all free street **PAGEANTS**
 at 9 A.M. on the morning of the exhibition.

General Admission to all the 15 Shows, 50 cts. Children under Nine 25 cts.

Performances twice daily. Afternoon at 2, Evening at 8.
 Doors open an hour earlier. All tents remain up until 9 P.M.
 To accommodate those wishing to avoid the crowds at the wagon, a branch ticket office has been established at

ANDRUS & CHURCH'S Book Store, 41 E. State St.,
 where reserved seats can be purchased at the regular price, and admission tickets at the usual slight advance on the day of the show.

CHEAP EXCURSION TICKETS ON ALL RAILROADS.
 Will Exhibit in Elmira, Aug. 12; Cortland, August 14.

immediately built, huge caldrons were hung over them, and in a very short time the preparation of breakfast was actively under way. While it was cooking, the dining tents were being erected. There were several of these dining tents. There was one for the officers and the performers, one for the side-show and "privilege" people, and one for the workingmen. In the tents were long tables, made so that they could be taken apart and packed in a small space, long benches, and various side tables. The dining tables were neatly set for breakfast, and had clean tablecloths and napkins on them. Indeed, cleanliness is one of the first rules about the big show, and its violation is never excused. The tables will seat over 600 persons.

The reporter took a seat near the end of one of the tables. Near him was Mr. Merritt F. Young, the handsome and ever-genial treasurer of the show, who can sell tickets faster, and make change with greater rapidity and with fewer mistakes than any man in the country. Mr. Henry Merriam, his able assistant and lighting ticket counter, was there too, as was the only Dick Elliott, who sells tickets for the side-show and who can talk harder and longer about the Texas giants, the lady with the elastic skin, the lady who wears snake jewelry, and his very particular friends the Zulus, than any man in the civilized world. George Conklin, the veteran lion and tiger tamer who took the Evening Sun reporters into the wild beasts' cages in Madison Square Garden last March, was also on hand at the matutinal meal. The bill of fare for breakfast in this traveling hotel embraced steaks, chops, ham and eggs, biscuits, bread and butter, milk, and coffee. Everything was well cooked and nicely served.

After breakfast the reporter went over to the menagerie tent, which was now up and full of cages. A gang of men were arranging the cages in a row around the sides. They had a very able and powerful assistant at this work. The assistant was the big elephant Mandarin. The men would take the tongue of the wagon and point it in the right direction. Then at the word of command Mandarin would put his big head against the rear of the cage and push. When the cage arrived at its destination Mandarin would stop pushing and go to the next one. An elephant can in this way perform as much work as the combined strength of fifty men would accomplish.

The other tents were scenes of busy activity, too, and everywhere the workers were getting ready for the big parade and the afternoon performance. The performers put on their parade suits, the animal trainers pulled their be-spangled and glittering garments over their every-day clothes, the bands got out their instruments, and began a few preliminary toots, horses were gaily caparisoned and harnessed to the various show wagons, dens of performing beasts, calliopes, and bell chimes, and shortly after 9 o'clock the huntsmen and ladies of the chase led the procession up through the beautifully shaded streets of Waterbury. The entire town turned out to see the free show and the side streets were full of buggies and farmers' wagons. For circus day is a big thing in Waterbury. As one of the citizens remarked, it is better observed than any other holiday in the year. The Fourth of July is not to be compared to it. There is no school on circus day in Waterbury, and all the factories shut down until the big show goes away.

Demonstrating the immense drawing power of the Barnum name, equal partner James A. Bailey didn't even get his name in print in this 1889 newspaper ad from Ithaca, New York's Weekly Ithacan of August 2, 1889. Pfening Archives.

There are no watches turned out on that day, and the hum of the brass spinner is hushed.

Back to the circus grounds they all come at about 11 o'clock, followed by a big crowd of the townspeople. It is too early for the circus proper, but the side show is open and waiting for its harvest of dimes, and the seductive peanut awaits a customer.

In the Ticket Sellers' Wagon

At 12 o'clock dinner is ready and is eaten with a relish by the performers and others who have been in the parade, and by those who have been working on the grounds all the morning getting the big main tent ready with its rings, gymnastic apparatus, and thousands of seats. The reporter enjoyed the well-cooked meal, too, and afterward strolled over to the ticket wagon where Treasurer Young and Mr. Merriam had already ensconced themselves. He was kindly permitted to take a seat in the wagon behind two expert ticket sellers. The sale of tickets did not begin until 1 o'clock. A few minutes before that time the treasurer and his assistant arranged a pile of silver change on the shelf in front of them. A cigar box held the small change. Between them was an empty waste paper basket of generous proportions. As the hour approached when the sale of tickets was to begin, the crowd gathered around the front of the wagon and grew clamorous. The ticket sellers paid not the slightest attention to them. They calmly waited until 1 o'clock precisely, and then opened the windows. Instantly there was a rush of people with money on the outside, and half a hundred hands were held up for tickets. Calmly and coolly, but without a second of wasted time, those two men began to take in money and give out tickets and change. Both hands were working with clock work regularity, and the bills were rapidly swept into the big waste paper basket between them. Some of them floated to the floor, but there was no time to pick them up. They lay where they fell, and when in less than half an hour the basket became full and overflowed, and the breeze came in and sent the money eddying about the floor and up into the corners and around the reporter's head, those two men paid not the slightest attention to it, but went on selling tickets to all who would buy.

"Say, mister, how much for me?" called out a boy who had got close up to the wagon and who was stooping so that his full height would escape notice.

"Fifty cents for all boys nine year or over," said Mr. Young.

"I'm only nine," said the boy.

"Fifty cents for nine years old," said Mr. Young, and the boy put up his half dollar.

A gentleman came to the wagon with three ladies and a little girl.

"Four tickets and one adult," he said confidently, but Mr. Young knew that he meant a half ticket when he said "adult" and made no comment. The man went away satisfied. Many looked quite dazed at the rapidity with which their money was seized and the tickets and change put out in its place. They took it and counted it over many times to see that it was right, and then they stood with the crowd and enjoyed the sight of the ticket seller at work. At least a score of persons tried to pay too much for their tickets. They looked greatly astonished when the surplus money was shoved back at them. For fully an hour the rush for tickets continued, and Mr. Young and Mr. Merriam kept working hard all that time, Mr. Young occasionally pausing merely long enough to cash one of the many checks which were handed in to him for payment.

And so the circus had begun again, and the performers were going through their various acts once more. The reporter had seen it all by this time, and as one day is precisely like another with the circus there was little else for him to learn. Of course there are other matters which can hardly be even briefly mentioned in an ordinary newspaper article. The work of the advance agents and the advertising cars, the press agent's duties, the man whose duty is to procure the grounds and get the licenses, the man who studies out the time tables weeks in advance and makes the contracts with the railroads, the man who buys the hay and the feed and sawdust and straw for wet grounds, the stereopticon man who goes a week ahead and reminds the people that the show is surely coming, and many other men who have their particular duties to perform, and who must be men of ability and experience and rare judgment; all these must be passed over with merely a brief mention.

Surely it takes little short of genius to properly manage a big traveling circus on the road, and James A. Bailey can do it more systematically, with the assistance of General Manager Frank Hyatt, than any man living.

The cost for running the circus for one day is about \$4,000 all told. BW

Bandwagon Back Issues

Almost every back number of *Bandwagon* is available from May-June 1957, the first issue in the current format, to November-December 2011. That's an incredible fifty-four years of circus history, over 300 issues, over 1000 articles, and over 15,000 illustrations.

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History of the 101 Ranch Wild West from 1925 to 1931, March-April and May-June 1975.

Human cannonballs and the Zacchini family, November-December 1976 and November-December 1978.

Arthur Concello's remarkably frank interview with Tom Parkinson, September-October 2001.

Elephants in America from 1796 to 1860, January-February 1987 and September-October 1991.

Famed rider Dorothy Herbert's autobiography, November-December 1988 to November-December 1989.

Hoxie Tucker and his circuses, September-October 1992 to January-February 1993.

Price is \$7.00 per issue, \$2.50 postage for one issue; \$5.00 for two or more issues. In some cases only two or three copies of an issue are available so order early and often. Make out check to Circus Historical Society and send to: Bandwagon Back Issues, 1075 W. Fifth Avenue, Columbus OH 43212.

"A Pilgrimage to Mecca"

CHS Conventioneers Gather in Baraboo After a Decade Absence

by Richard W. Flint

For many, Baraboo is the circus Mecca and 128 Circus Historical Society members re-affirmed that fact when they gathered in the town of the Ringling brothers for their 2012 convention on June 13-16, 2012. The annual gathering of the tribe was augmented by 83 members of the Circus Model Builders who exhibited their craftsmanship in Circus World Museum's Deppe Wagon Pavilion. Further swelling attendance was the presence of 52 Circus Kirk alumni in town for a reunion planned to coincide with the CHS convention. Assuming much overlap, an estimated 200 circus enthusiasts were in town for the long weekend. The convention was the largest in years, and the usual jackpots, the show term for storytelling, abounded. Members came from 23 states and, surprisingly, several each from four foreign countries: Canada, France, Germany, and Australia. Veteran showmen were again among the attendees, reveling in the chance to talk of the old days to a ready audience of history buffs. Among others, perennial sideshow man Ward Hall, always dapper in his white suit, was present as was first-time convention visitor Kenny Dodd, one of the best-looking white face and producing clowns of his era. And there were first-of-Mays in abundance as well; more than 20% indicated it was their first CHS convention.

Baraboo hosted its first CHS convention in 1952 when retired Ringling lawyer John M. Kelley began promoting the museum idea. When the museum opened in 1959, the CHS was again there, and with the rapid growth of Circus World Museum in the following decade, including the opening of its research library, Baraboo became a kind of Mecca, hosting 40% of the conventions in the 1960s and 1970s. Once a decade then became the norm and so 2012 meant that it was time to return. Baraboo is a good show town for the CHS and this year the strong attendance and the grand benefit auction of circus memorabilia netted a nice



Knowledgeable readers will recognize the author's allusion to the full title of the Sells Bros. Circus in 1892. Appropriately, the convention's farthest-traveled attendee came from Australia. Circus World Museum collection.

profit. Registrations exceeded advance estimates and brought in \$16,603.50 against expenses of \$7,844.00 for a profit of \$8,759.50.

With income from the benefit auction yielding \$7,992.00, the convention added a welcomed \$16,751.50 to the treasury.

In advance of the convention proper, CHS officers and directors gathered for a two day strategic planning session at the Clarion Hotel in West Baraboo, site of opening day registration on Wednesday and all later sessions. The first option for early arrivals, however, was a tour of the museum's library conducted by Pete Schrake, the head of the research facility. For many, there was great interest in seeing and learning about the current state of the Parkinson Library, named for its long-time director, the late Bob Parkinson, a CHS past-president. Bob's widow Marilyn Parkinson was there to greet arriving members for which Pete and his assistant Ralph Pierce had arranged a nifty display of



Some of the international contingent enjoying themselves on the grounds of Circus World Museum. From left: Daniel Lyon, Canada; Dr. Gerard Borg and Dr. Jeanne-Evonne Borg, France; Jochen Brocks, Australia; Anna-Sophie Jurgens, Germany; and Al Stencell, Canada. Brocks traveled the farthest to the convention. John E. Gilmore, III photo.

some remarkable objects from the collections. Here we could see actual glassware used by Ringling concessionaires in the wagon show days; rare photographs gleaned from the extensive holdings from the Gollmar show, Baraboo's "other" circus family; and Felix Adler's clown shoes and his distinctive trick bird-cage hat. As the tour moved to the basement, historic artifacts such as a scarred grandstand chair from the tragic 1944 Hartford fire and Al Ringling's pocket watch were also shown. A highlight was the presence of member and model builder Walter Heist who recently donated his 70 year collection of circiana to the museum. Walter chose carefully, having first visited the museum a year ago to assess first-hand its status given the difficulties the museum has faced in recent years. His collection, which filled a couple hundred feet of shelving in his Harrisburg, Pennsylvania house as well as his entire basement, arrived last January and has been nearly fully processed with many fascinating items already incorporated into exhibits. For example, boss canvasman Leonard Aylesworth's decorated box of tools to lay out the lot and repair canvas along with a Cole Bros. cookhouse waiter's apron can be seen in the Ring Barn. Among the library materials, which made up the bulk of his collection, are dozens of American Circus Corporation letters.

Most impressive for this reviewer, who spent two summers working for Bob Parkinson in the early 1970s and who had not been to Baraboo since 2005, was the immaculate arrangement of small objects in special museum and archival storage cases and cabinets in the basement. Members on the tour were equally impressed with the manner and courtesy of Peter Shrake, who came to the museum in January 2011 after several years at the Wisconsin Historical Society where he was responsible for organizing the McCormick papers, the second largest collection in the state's system after the Baraboo circus collection. It, too, is rich in ephemeral source material so Pete was accustomed to organizing more than just books and business correspondence. While he might apologize for being new to circus history, he displayed a rapid learning curve and has a genuine desire to help researchers. He also pointed out rows of shelves with boxes yet to be cataloged; for a goodly number he was able to explain his goals in processing the material based on the importance of each group. For example, the massive Ringling-Barnum show papers, filling an entire aisle of floor-to-ceiling shelves, will be processed at the box content level in the coming year. Later plans call for more detailed processing at the file-folder level.

Tour goers reacted with particular delight in learning about the library's new capabilities for digital scanning. In August, 2011 Pete and assistant Ralph Pierce completed work underwritten by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency, which launched the museum's collections into the online digital world. The grant first enabled the museum to acquire a flat-bed digital scanner large enough to copy images up to 11" x 17" as well as two large professional printers. Second, the grant supported work to scan 1377 glass-plate photographs, over 900 of which were by the well-known Harry Atwell. All of these are now available to search and see online. Go to <http://circus.pastperfect-online.com/30070cgi/mweb.exe?request=ks> to begin a search. Additional good news presented by Pete was the announcement that the library would soon receive a new \$9,000.00 large-format camera that would enable digital scans from posters and other very large items up to 42" wide and infinite length. CHS member Greg Parkinson launched the fund-raising effort and solicited about nine contributors to make the donation. Greg, who was present for the tour, received applause

for his initiative. In addition, Pete also thanked the local Circus Fans Association tent for its purchase of a hand-held digital camera, useful for documenting three-dimensional objects in the collection.

Thursday morning began three days of historical presentations at the Clarion Hotel, the convention headquarters. We started from the winter quarters of the Barnum circus in Bridgeport, Connecticut with Bruce Hawley's presentation on "Bridgeport: Home of the Greatest Show on Earth for Half a Century [1881-1927]." Bruce's work was inspired by his great-grandfather and grandfather who were both wheelwrights at the quarters. His presentation was largely based on property maps and similar records, but he also showed some of the tools used by his ancestors who first began work at the quarters in 1896. Leaving winter quarters, we then went "on the road" with the Reynolds Family Circus, an under-canvas school show Bill and Jeanne Reynolds operated in the Midwest from the late 1980s through the early 2000s. They had plenty of amusing stories recounting their effort to operate their small circus.

Pete Schrake concluded the morning sessions by demonstrating, with an Internet connection projected on the large screen, the use of the CWM Library website. A good research website is more than just images but includes ways to limit a search using specific criteria for both visual and non-visual research material. Pete provided



Circus World Museum archivist Pete Shrake welcomes CHS members to their backyard tour of the library. In the foreground are Felix Adler's shoes and bird-cage hat on box. Richard W. Flint photo.

an introduction to how a collection is processed and then placed online. Users are encouraged to visit the website, noted previously, as well as a second website <http://www.cwmfindingaids.com/> where a drop-down menu provides links to detailed item-level collection listings. Here, for example, we discover great detail about such significant collections as the papers of William P. Hall, the Gollmar Circus, George Chindahl, and Henry Moeller and smaller archives such as those of Gordon Lillie and Pat Valdo.

After a break for lunch, Debbie Walk of the Ringling Museum turned everyone's head with the story of an unusual performer, "The Man with the Perfect Neck: Hillary Long." Debbie recounted her process of documenting a small gift to the museum that revealed

through her research a career that spanned from Australia to Spain. Known as the “upside down man,” Hillary Long (1884-1930) did stunts upon his head that “most people would not care to attempt with their feet.” After appearing in vaudeville, he began performing with the Frank A. Robbins circus in 1911, doing an act of walking up stairs on his head. While balanced upon his head he smoked and drank and even spun about on his head under the big top. He subsequently worked with Sparks and Ringling.

Bob Cline then told of “When 11th Century Architecture Invaded the 20th Century Circus,” a presentation on his long standing interest in cottage cage wagon design. Bob focused on 1896 when the largest order of cottage cages was executed for John Robinson. Bob’s slides compared detail enlarged from rare cage wagon photographs with the revival architecture of Victorian streetscapes.

Steve Gossard concluded the day’s education with “When Hollywood Met the Circus: Del Graham’s training facility at Thousand Oaks, California.” The site, which flourished from the late 1950s into the 1970s, was a trapeze practice facility where many Hollywood personalities such as David Nelson spent time mixing with circus professionals. Graham’s open door, anything goes policy reflected the hippie culture of the time and Steve’s talk generated many audience comments.

For about 30 years the CHS has conducted an auction of quality and collectible circusiana donated by members and sold for the benefit of the organization. This year’s bid-fest included several rare couriers from the late 19th century and a couple of posters from the early years of the 20th. Smart buyers also found scarce programs from the first years of Cirque du Soleil as well as a goodly number of affordable 12” x 20” Ed Kelty images. Several rare items headed to new homes in England and France. Auctioneers Al Stencell and John Polacsek kept the bidding going with plenty of entertaining banter. Of special note, glass artist Carrie Battista donated two of her creations, beautifully inspired by the architecture of canvas tents that fetched several hundred dollars from an awed audience. The list of donors includes (and we apologize to anyone we missed) Carrie Battista, Bill and Jan Biggerstaff, Father Jim Challancin, Circus World Museum, Bob Cline, Clown Hall of Fame, Fred Dahlinger, Guy Fiorenza, Steve Flint, Ken Harck, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Fred D. Pfening III, John Polacsek, Rick Purdue, Richard J. Reynolds III, Willis Shane, and Kristin Spangenberg.

Friday morning began with a “first time in America” appearance of Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Director of the National Fairground Archive and Head of Cultural Engagement at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. This lively lady, who has done much to preserve the records of traveling entertainments in England, titled her talk “Who Do You Think You Are . . . Lord George Sanger? Myths and Reality.” Sanger, the British Barnum, wrote a fabled autobiography which, like Barnum’s, was sold on his show and went through numerous re-printings. A classic filled with delightful accounts of traveling life, it is woefully lacking in dates and details of his business life. Considering that a serious look at his remarkable life is long overdue, it is surprising that no writer has attempted the task. Vanessa, however, provided us with a tantalizing new introduction to his life illustrated with rare photographs including several of Sanger’s elaborately ornate parade wagons, including one in the collection at Baraboo. She reminded us of two brothers, George (1827-1911) and John (ca1819-1889), self-anointed “Lords,” who were partnered from 1853 to 1884 when they split their assets with the toss of a coin. John continued to travel in the UK while George played the continent, as he had

from 1874 until the death of his brother. The Sangers were famous for managing Astley’s Amphitheatre, the old cradle of the British circus, from 1871 to its 1893 close. They had intriguing associations with American showmen including Seth B. Howes, P. T. Barnum, and Buffalo Bill. Lord George was the first president of the British Showmen’s Guild. After he was tragically murdered by a deranged employee on his farm in 1911, his funeral was a national event drawing 1000 showmen from all over Europe. Vanessa noted that much detail about the Sangers can be gleaned from *The Era*, Britain’s theatrical newspaper that began in 1838 and available since 2007 as searchable digitized content in the “19th Century British Library Newspapers Database.” As examples, she displayed a number of *Era* articles from the 1860s about the Sanger show, an important period for Sanger and the British circus generally as, she explained, it was “Part of the rapid expansion in circus from 1860 onwards.” For all of Professor Toulmin’s extensive scholarly activities and varied contributions, perhaps none is as valuable to entertainment historians as her participation as a member of the British Library editorial board that carefully selected 49 national and local UK newspapers, including *The Era*, to provide a broad yet detailed digitized view of British life in the 19th century.

From the difficulties of documenting the distant past, the next presentation looked at the very recent past, “The Emerging Circus: American and European Perspectives.” Two Fulbright scholars who have studied circus in England and France, Amy Cohen and Kevin Duncan Wall, gave a lively and very visual recounting of the renaissance of the circus in the last 30 years, especially through circus schools and youth circuses. In Europe, the “modern circus” has developed into a vibrant and respected cultural form, practiced by hundreds of companies and in thousands of schools. Kevin, who attended the Ecole Nationale du Cirque in Paris in 2003, is familiar to readers of CHS member Ernie Albrecht’s *Spectacle* magazine where he often writes about contemporary circus; his forthcoming book *Silk & Sawdust: Inside the Astonishing World of the Circus, Past & Present* is expected to appear next year from Knopf. Amy Cohen is the new Executive Director of the rapidly growing American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) and a graduate of Ithaca



The inimitable Al Stencell working his magic as he takes bids on a Seals-Sterling poster held by Kristin Spangenberg at the auction. John E. Gilmore, III photo.

College where she founded ICircus, its circus arts club. In addition, she has a master's degree from New York University's Gallatin School with a concentration in "circus as a tool for social change, education, and creative expression." Differing dramatically from the circus familiar to most in attendance, their rapid paced overview is fair-warning about what is ahead for the circus.

Board member Matthew Wittmann, curatorial fellow at the Bard Graduate Center in New York City, informed those in attendance about his forthcoming exhibition and publication on the "Circus and the City: New York, 1793-2010." Opening September 21, 2012 at the Bard center in Manhattan, it uses New York City as a lens through which to explore the extraordinary development and spectacular pageantry of the American circus. Remarkable objects to be seen in the exhibit caused members to sit up in their seats, make plans to see the exhibit, and acquire the accompanying two publications coming from Yale University Press. With our appetite to see the exhibit and publications sufficiently tantalized, conventioneers adjourned for lunch.



*Lane Talburt showed an interview he conducted with Edward Hoagland, author of the classic circus novel *Cat Man*. John E. Gilmore, III photo.*

work is sort of a Jacob Riis "how the other half lives" approach. In a way, then, it is similar to one episode of the recent PBS Big Apple series that dragged on for an entire evening about the newly hired working kids preoccupation with their girlfriends and tattoos that failed to entice me—a sobering reminder for this historian of how I might have reacted to *Cat Man* when first published. Lane again proved he has the keen ability to recognize not only interesting but important material and struck gold with Hoagland. Enraptured, we were able to listen to Hoagland tell us how he is the fictitious main character and that all of the other people and the descriptions of them utilized real nicknames and recount real events he witnessed on Ringling-Barnum as a menagerie cage boy during the summers of 1951 and 1952. The then recent Harvard grad recalled how quickly the book was issued—and which his father attempted, unsuccessfully, to squash during a direct intervention with the publisher, Houghton Mifflin. *Cat Man* is my next book to read again.

Rodney Huey, former Ringling-Barnum PR guru turned college professor, reported on activities of the Monte Carlo-based World Circus Federation, particularly its efforts to raise the image of the

circus, and introduced a colorful new publication it has issued as a guide to media members who cover the circus. Much like a pitchmen in the middle of a show, he had agents passing in the aisles selling the booklets to interested members. Maureen Brunsdale from the Milner Library at Illinois State University followed with a presentation highlighting interesting American-based collections held there, including several recently acquired diaries of Tuffy Genders donated by his granddaughter.

Friday evening brought everyone together for the annual banquet and its two special events. First, Vanessa Toulmin returned as the featured speaker to tell us about the work she has been doing in England as head of the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield in England. Born into a fairground family, she was an insatiable reader and had great curiosity about the ancient past and so went to university to earn her degrees. Soon, her work brought her to examine her own heritage resulting in the fortunate discovery of some of the earliest moving picture films which just happened to have been shown on fairgrounds and so began her recognition as an important film scholar. Since film studies are a large academic field attracting wide interest, Vanessa soon earned respect that furthered her work and her career. What some might call flamboyant is really an amazing talent to see new ways of engaging modern audiences with new interpretations of traditional popular entertainments. Among her achievements are lavish fund-raising entertainment events recognizing the history of the amusement resort of Blackpool.

On a more somber note was a remembrance of the late CHS past president, and writer Stuart Thayer. In attendance was his widow Boyka whose personal recollections brought back memories of a helpful friend eager to share his encyclopedic and analytical knowledge of the circus. Clearly, Stuart relished his research and



Professor Vanessa Toulmin. John E. Gilmore, III photo.



The real and the miniature circus together for our inspection. The Circus Model Builders exhibited their models in Circus World Museum's Deppe Wagon Pavilion. Dave Lorbiske photo.

the puzzles he had to address as part of his historical writing. When he faced a question, how could anyone forget the wide grin that would cross his face as his mind was set in motion. Boyka shared with her audience the last entry in a personal journal he compiled for her shortly before his death: "Have fun, I did."

In recognition of Stuart's contributions in researching and writing circus history, the CHS recently established the Stuart Thayer Prize to recognize a work of superior merit on the history of the circus and allied arts published the previous year. On behalf of the prize committee, Chairperson Maureen Brunsdale came forward to announce the first winner of the new award, which included a plaque and a \$500.00 check. Winner Richard Georgian, author of *Cossacks, Indians, and Buffalo Bill*, was recognized for pursuing an interest in family history that led to his writing a book that addressed much larger issues including entertainment history, ethnicity, and culture. After a standing ovation, Richard related how joining the CHS and the support of its many members including Stuart Thayer, aided and influenced his research. And like Stuart, he confessed to the fun he had doing the research and writing of the book.

Saturday morning drew a large audience, many of them being Circus Kirk alumni, for a panel discussion about "Dr. Charles Boas and Circus Kirk, Living an American Dream." Boas, who died in 2002, gained national fame when he appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine for June 2, 1961, because he gave up his college professorship to join Penny Bros. Circus as a clown. In 1969 with the aid of a church organization he established Circus Kirk, a youth circus that ran through 1978. The panel of Kirk alumni included Boas' son Charlie, Susan Montague, Mark Beard-Witherup, and Larry Cimino. Interestingly, one panelist remains in show business as a television stagehand while others became a college fundraiser or worked in neuroscience for an international pharmaceutical firm. Needless to say, the panel session was lively and fun, sparked by many in the audience who were generous in asking questions, adding details, or offering alternate versions of events! On Sunday, it should be noted, the alumni enjoyed a special viewing of Kirk memorabilia at the CWM library including Boas' own clown suit and shoes as well as some of the business records donated by Jim Kieffer, a CHS member, Kirk alum, and reunion planner. The Kirk reunion, not incidentally, attracted 52 attendees from as far away as Germany who were once troupers 40 or so years ago.

Steve Freese, Executive Director of Circus World, brought good news about improvements at Circus World Museum. After an extremely difficult period that the museum endured, not the least of which was a serious flood that threatened the historic buildings and some rail cars, the institution is nearly "afloat" again with its debts reduced to manageable proportions. Applause from the membership greeted this news. In some ways, Steve explained, good has come from near disaster: flood insurance resulted in the replacement of damaged black asphalt that covered the entire entrance area and had long radiated heat upon arriving visitors—a



One of the convention's highlights was the awarding of the first Stuart Thayer Prize honoring the best work in circus history from the previous year. From left: Maureen Brunsdale, Stuart Thayer Prize committee head; Richard Georgian, Thayer Prize winner; Boyka Thayer, widow of Stuart Thayer; and Judy Griffin, CHS president. John E. Gilmore, III photo.

source of visitor complaints—with new and attractive landscaping featuring grassy rest areas and pleasant visitor pathways at the main entrance area.

Thayer award recipient Richard A. Georgian concluded the presentations by recounting a "Day in the Life of a Wild West show." Based on his extensive research for his book, we were given a behind the scenes account of a typical day with a Wild West show starting with the advance crew through to the departure of the show for the next town.

Just as Richard's Wild West shows had to tear down and move to the next town, so too did the CHS convention have to prepare to leave town, not to set up again for another year. Great credit must go to convention planners Judy and Gary Griffin; to the auction crew of Al Stencell, John Polacsek and Kristin Spangenberg; to Circus World Museum staff members Steve Freese, Pete Shrake and Ralph Pierce; and to photographer John Gilmore as well as the Clarion Hotel staff. In addition, thanks go to Jim Kieffer for spearheading the Circus Kirk reunion and to Gollmar Ring president Steve Flint and the original man who watered the elephants, Randy Peterson, who teamed to produce the largest circus model exhibit of 2012.

As the sun began to cast its beams lower in the sky across the lot that is the CWM grounds, CHS members joined their counterparts in the CMB for the finale, a picnic on the show grounds. Visiting, the exchange of email addresses, and convivial conversations about circuses continued into the evening but soon became only final memories as the 2012 convention folded its canvas. This was the big show, even if the CHS officers promise, like showmen of the past, that next year will be bigger and better. Since my first CHS convention in 1972 (in Baraboo), each convention I've attended is the most enjoyable because these feasts are so festive with their grand gathering of ardent aficionados. BW

Richard W. Flint, a museum professional, is a past president of the CHS (1982-85), and has spent a lifetime studying the history of the circus. He organized memorable conventions in Akron, Ohio; Washington D.C.; Pittsfield, Massachusetts; and Baraboo, Wisconsin.

8 MONSTER SHOWS UNITED 8

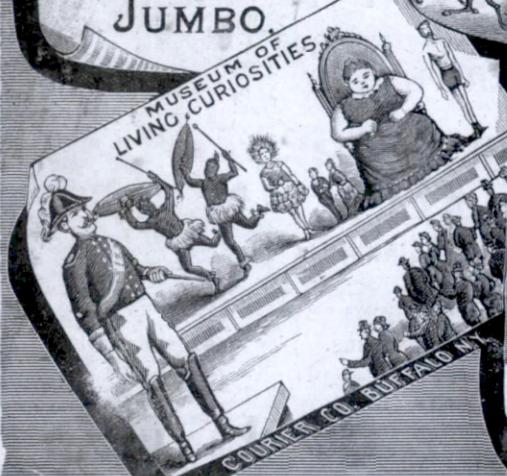
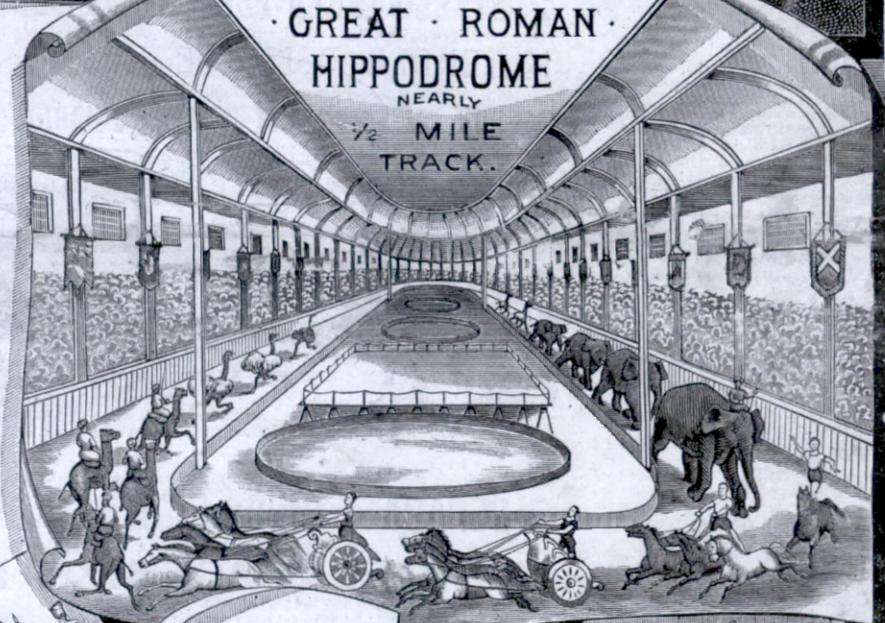
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